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UNMETERED ISPs ON TEST

Slash your Internet bills

Fixed fee providers that really deliver

CHARLIE'S ANGEL
Where to buy Diaz's new DVD online – before it hits the shops

MP3: WHO NEEDS NAPSTER?
Download all the top artists for just £7 a month – and it's legal

ARE YOU USING THE RIGHT WEBMAIL SERVICE?

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BT

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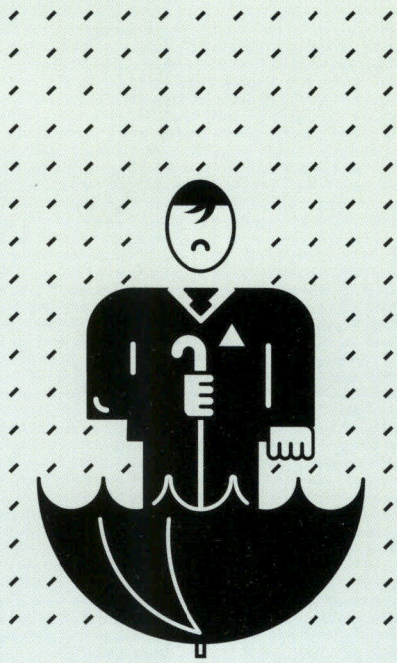

This is wrong. An umbrella is not a pogo stick.

This is right. Well done.

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ESSENTIALS

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We're sworn to saving you time and money by bringing you the best of the Internet every month *and* giving technical advice that will make mastering the Net cheaper and easier.

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Got a technical query? Call our Net helpline on 0208 267 5933 between 2pm and 5pm each Thursday for one-on-one advice, or send an email to ***thenetnow@haynet.com*** for a written reply.

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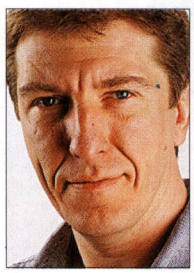
:-) FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to *the net*, the UK's finest Internet magazine



People are such ungrateful animals. You offer them globally-renowned recording artists and pristine sound quality at £12.99 a shot, and what do they do? They rip you off, that's what. A small band of them (well, OK, 50 million if you want to get picky) begin swapping the results of those artists' efforts over the Internet, with not a single penny changing hands. So who's going to support and promote those artists? Who do you think drew your attention to them in the first place? The music industry, that's who. And by using Napster, it's those artists you starve of their lifeblood.

Heart bleeding yet? Thought not. Fact is, the record industry is closer to its vengeance on the Bluebeards of the Music World than ever before (see page 32). Yet in bars and clubs around Britain, few will be cheering Napster's demise.

Why? Because while many sensible folk would rightly recognise the music business' case, even more were sick of CD prices. So much so that when the freeloader's bandwagon came along, there was a willing mob ready to jump aboard.

In fairness, it appears at last to have taken the message on board. If Napster has served one purpose, it has been to make an industry realise that it cannot continue selling music by the unit – and today, we're on the brink of the real revolution.

In this new world, you'll pay a subscription fee for music, much as you do for a host of Sky TV channels. As you'll discover in this issue, there's already one major MP3 site offering just such a service – and we'll guarantee that many more will fall into line. Now all we need is for BT to roll out ADSL at a respectable pace. But that's another story...

Mark Payton, **EDITOR**
mark.payton@haynet.com

thismonth»

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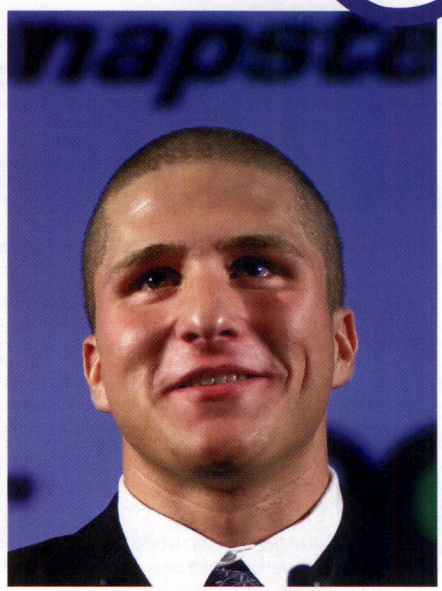

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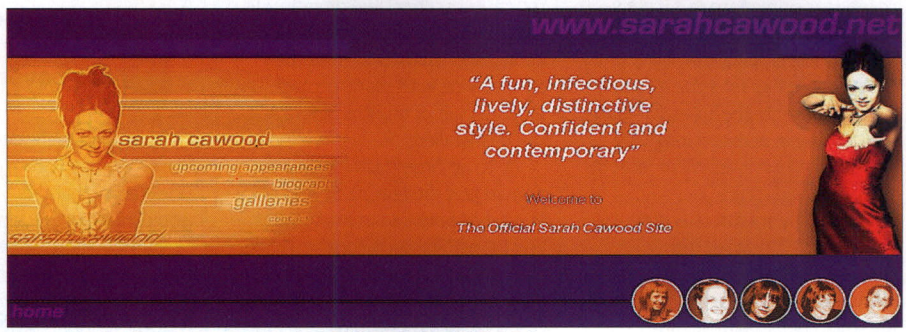

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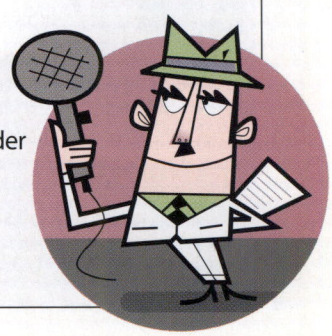


Britain to get fastest Net access in Europe – honest

EXCLUSIVE Labour promises broadband UK – at a time when we're *still* waiting for ADSL

A new Government report is promising British Internet users faster Net access than their European counterparts within the next four years – even though Labour has decided against a £1bn investment in the spread of high speed Internet access.

The report, *UK Online: The Broadband Future*, insists the United Kingdom will have 'the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005'. It goes on to target schools, libraries and colleges as prime targets for early broadband connection.

To aid the process, the Government has set aside a £30m fund to promote the spread of high-speed Internet access; a long way short of the £1bn investment recently touted by ministers.

Predictably, the UK telecoms industry has slammed the Government decision. In an interview with the FT, Thomas Kressner, chief executive of Yes TV, the broadband services provider, said: 'If the idea is to become a leader in broadband, then £30m is a very small amount of money.'

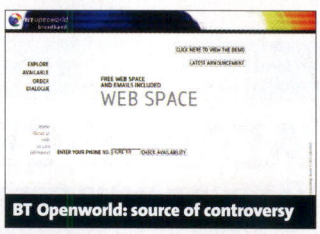
In response, e-commerce minister Patricia Hewitt said the government chose not to spend £1bn to upgrade all the UK's telephone exchanges because it could be 'a waste of taxpayers' money'.

The decision follows the Government's farcical auction of broadband fixed wireless access licences, which they hoped would raise £1bn but in the end attracted a mere £38m. Of 42 licences offered for BFWA, which offers high speed Internet via radio waves, only 10 were sold, leaving half of the country without coverage.

The report comes at a time when the key player in UK broadband growth, British Telecom, is under continuing pressure to up the pace of its broadband ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) programme. The company has already publicly apologised to customers for the slow service, with many people facing a wait of months before ADSL can be installed.

Up to 40 times faster than a normal 56K modem, ADSL fires data at rates of between 1.5 and 9MBps and its installation means you have a permanent connection to the Internet for one fixed fee (in BT's case, £39.99 a month).

When launching the service to the public last August, BT quoted an installation rate of 5,000 homes per day, with an expectation that this would increase to 15,000 by March 2001. Its stated target was 70-80,000 homes by April of this year. Today, BT says that 35,000 UK homes have ADSL.

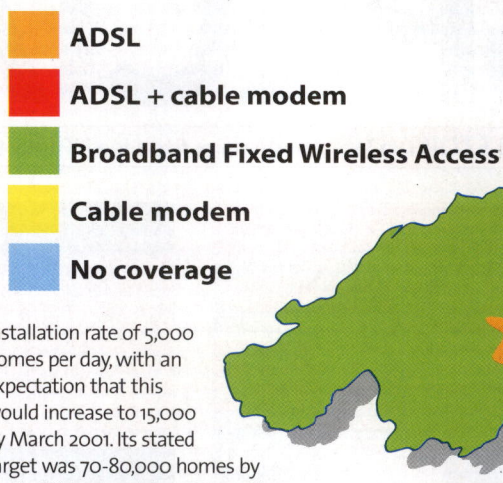


BT Openworld: source of controversy

In theory, you should have a choice of ADSL supplier; a host of ISPs, including Madasafish and Demon, have been advertising their high-speed services. But now ISPs are accusing the telecoms giant of 'keeping ADSL to itself'. Says Freeserve chief executive John Pluthero: 'At the current pathetic levels of allocation granted to us by BT, it would take us three or four years to get where BT Openworld is today.' As we went to press, the BT Openworld site (***www.btopenworld.com***) featured a statement that customers already connected to an ADSL-enabled exchange 'could be (subject to survey) up and running within 15 days'. Watch this space for future developments.

HOW LABOUR SEES BROADBAND BRITAIN

The UK online report's official vision of the 'anticipated' roll-out of broadband



I WANT MY ADSL... AND I WANT IT NOW

READER EXPERIENCES»

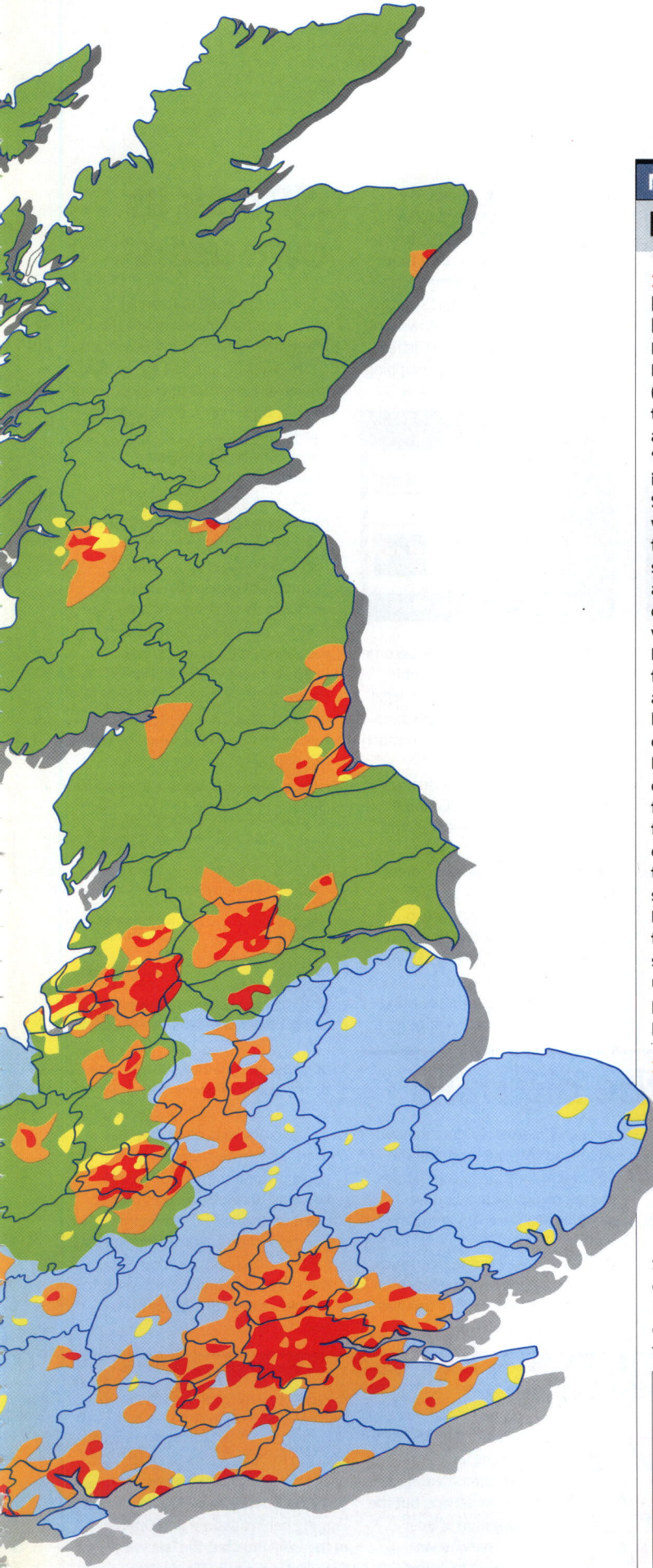
NAME: CHRIS GRUNDY
LOCATION: WALTON-UPON-THAMES, SURREY
OCCUPATION: ACCOUNTANT
AGE: 31

'I've wanted ADSL since last summer. I'm sick of tapping the desk at the end of a 56K modem and the BT service seems of offer the ideal solution. When I checked on the BT site, I found that my postcode was covered, but then when I checked using my telephone number, it told me that I wasn't. I then downloaded a document from BT giving a timetable for exchanges getting ADSL. It said that my area would go 'live' in March 2000. When I called BT, I was told it wasn't – that was only one month ago.'

NAME: MIKE CURTIS
LOCATION: SPALDING, LINCOLNSHIRE
OCCUPATION: GRAPHIC DESIGNER
AGE: 27

'I have made a few calls to BT and each time I get different answers. The first time, I was told the new exchange for ADSL would be ready in late February or early March, but I was advised to check back later to make sure. When I called again to check I would still get it at the beginning of March, I was told it would be ready in mid-March. When I called again to place an order, the rep told me there was nothing scheduled to happen in March and I might be connected in June or July.'

PICTURES: PA



NEWS IN BRIEF

FIRST BYTES»

> BRITNEY'S BELLY BUSTS BRITANNICA

Encyclopaedia Brittanica's site (*www.britannica.com*) took a beating after attempting to up its 'cool' factor by posting images of Britney Spears' pierced navel. A whopping 17 million fans logged onto the site when an article about the teen's decorated bellybutton was posted. Britannica.com was forced to shut down for a period of time because it couldn't cope with the strain. Refusing to completely disregard its penchant for knowledgeable facts, the article discussed the 'history of the navel as sign and symbol in culture.' Britney's bare midriff, the article went on to say, 'lifted [her] to a unique position in the pantheon of teen pop stars.'

> EU LOOKS TO BAN MINI MARKETING

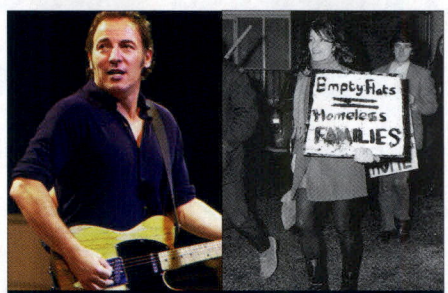
The new Swedish presidency of the European Union wants to put stop to Net marketing that targets under-12s. Similar to Sweden's existing ban on broadcast advertising directed at pre-teens, the embargo could spell disaster for kiddie sites. A recent survey by NOP Family revealed that over 4 million 7-16 year olds use the Net, with 35 percent viewing the ads that pop up while they're surfing. Sites such as Splash Plastic, an online payment card company for under-18s that advertises its services online, could see devastating losses if the ban is put into action. Log on to ***www.eu2001.se*** to catch up with the EU's latest decisions.

> THE BOSS LOSES DOMAIN

American rocker Bruce Springsteen has lost his case against accused domain squatter Jeff Burgar. The WIPO ruled that Burgar had 'legitimate interests in respect of [BruceSpringsteen.com].' Burgar registered BruceSpringsteen.com in 1996 under the name 'Bruce Springsteen Club', and said the domain was being used as a fan club for the Boss. It is alleged that Burgar owns over 1,500 domains and has been the subject of legal action from bigwigs such as Hewlett Packard. WIPO's panellists stated that the Net was 'a valuable source of information... and any attempt to curtail its use should be discouraged.'

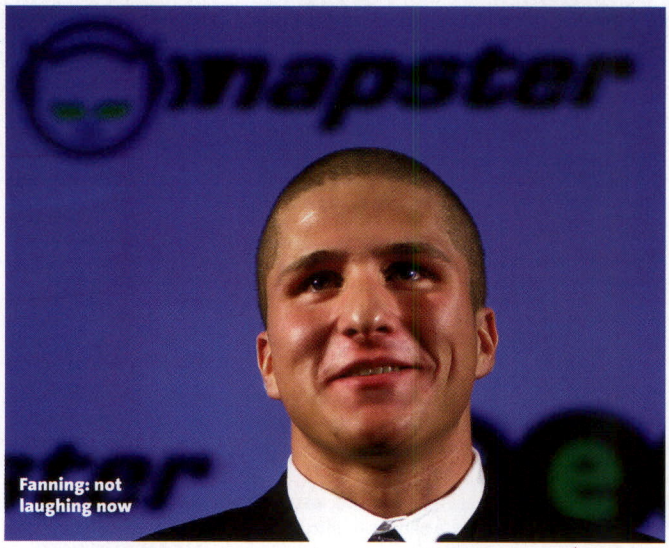
> GUARDIAN GETS NAMECHECKED

The Guardian Unlimited network has undergone a revamp, subtly changing the Unlimited brand name in the hope that it will provide them with a clearer identity for advertisers and users. This means that network sites such as Film Unlimited and Football Unlimited will now go under the names 'GuardianUnlimited Film' and 'GuardianUnlimited Football' respectively, therefore establishing themselves as part and parcel of the network as a whole and not as a separate entity. The URLs have also been tinkered with, with the main site changing from guardianunlimited.co.uk to guardian.co.uk. All Unlimited sites' URLs, will also come under the brand name, ie ***guardian.co.uk/film.***



Springsteen: not a fan of the humble squatter

Football Unlimited: coming under a new banner



Fanning: not laughing now

Napster case to raise PC prices?

'Recording device' makers may have to stump up

Napster's crucial defeat by the Recording Industry of America (RIAA) in the law courts last month has sparked fears among industry analysts that PC prices may rise.

In a Web chat on CNN.com, intellectual property attorney Kevin Grierson revealed that if the PC is deemed to be a recording device in the wake of the Napster trial, 'the recording industry would be entitled to royalties under the Audio Home Recording Act, so your PC would get more expensive.'

Bob Lewis, director general of the British Association of Record Dealers, feels a decision needs to be made. 'At the moment confusing signals are being sent out,' he said. 'We encourage people to buy a copying machine, then tell them not to copy.'

The California court ruled that Napster must stop trading in copyrighted material. The court stopped short of shutting the site down and referred the case back to a District court, but agreed that file-swapping infringes copyright. The RIAA is unlikely to give up what has become an increasingly bitter fight until Napster is closed down, either legally or through crushingly high damage awards, which could be as much as $100,000 per song.

Napster: facing an uncertain future

Given Napster's recent deal with the Bertelsmann Music Group, if Napster has a future, it's likely to involve subscriptions to cover copyright costs. As we go to press, Napster CEO Hank Barry and founder Shawn Fanning are in 'serious negotiations' with record companies to strike the deals which could keep Napster alive.

For more on the future of MP3, see our special report on page 32.

ISP sues its own users

The Free Internet Group, an ISP offering unmetered access to the Internet, is suing 12 of its subscribers.

The users in question are accused of breaking the ISP's rules by putting the dial-up to commercial uses. In a move which could set a legal precedent, the ISP is seeking financial compensation.

The Free Internet Group's home page (***www.thefreeinternet.net***) states that the dial-up is for 'personal home use only', warning that 'commercial users will have their accounts terminated without notice'. Last year, 400 subscribers were ejected from the service.

The company's description of commercial usage is 'the setting up of an email address(es) or the hosting of a Web site, whereby the Member seeks to elicit personal or business gain via the 0800 Service by the selling of goods or the provision of business-oriented services.'

TFI: for non-commercial users only

The problem is, of course, that many home users sign up for the personal tariff with an ISP despite knowing full well that they plan to use it for business. If The Free Internet Group's legal action against former subscribers is successful, then ISPs could find it even easier to remove undesirable heavy users from their books.

Amazon says goodbye to the big nails

After Christmas sales failed to save the day, Amazon, the most famous dot com in the world, has started tightening its belt.

To start with, 1,300 workers – 15 percent of staff – were laid off. According to the *Wall Street Journal* (***www.wsj.com***), chief executive Jeff Bezos explained the action through a company-wide email titled 'Get the Crap Out' demanding that Amazon 'ferociously manage the products we carry so that we sell only products that are profitable. The 30-pound box of nails isn't long for our world.' No official word has been forthcoming about the axing of nails or any other items.

In addition to cutting costs, Amazon is trying to generate extra revenue streams. Visitors can now download software from the site and one of Amazon's best features, the recommendations, is now available at a price. Any company seeking a 'recommended' slot on the Web site can pay Amazon as much as $10,000 per title. Just goes to show that there's no such thing as an advert-free Web site.

WAP SHOTS» SET UP YOUR MOBILE FOR WIRELESS

TAP A WAP MAP

It's such a good idea, it even rhymes. If you've ever wandered lost down unknown streets without your *A to Z* and felt the need to WAP up some help, you can do it to your heart's content through Maporama.com's link-up with Wappup.com. Go to the travel menu on Wappup, tap in your desired address and directions will appear on your phone screen.

AUDIO ON DEMAND

XY Network (***www.xy.fm***) is claiming a world first with its on-demand audio news service. Teaming up with Reuters, XY will deliver bulletins – news, entertainment, sport, business – to your mobile as an audio round-up as and when you please. XY is already chuffed with its personalised broadcast entertainment service, but the addition of on-demand news means no more waiting for Trevor McDonald. Which is no bad thing.

XY™ NETWORK

SONYPHONE?

Vodafone and Sony have announced plans to work together to bring PlayStation games to mobile phones. Vodafone has been seen as lagging behind Cellnet and Orange in the WAP race, but the link with Sony 'extending the PlayStation experience into the Vodafone mobile-phone environment' could change all that. Watch this space.

PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS

KNOWHOW THE EXPERT GUIDE

No.21: 3G

Don't tell me: the force a jet pilot feels when he pulls an inside loop?
Strangely enough, no. 3G (third generation if you must) is a high-speed data transfer and state-of-the-art radio terminal technology.
Sounds suspiciously like WAP.
WAP was merely a botched add-on to existing digital cellphone technology, whereas 3G has been designed from the ground up to deliver rich media and information to mobiles.
WAP in colour?
No, it'll be a lot better, mainly because it has considerably more bandwidth to play with. You'll be able to watch high-quality streaming video footage or hold a video-conference on the train.
But it costs me enough to send a three line email via WAP. How much is this going to set me back?
Communications should be reasonably priced, because 3G uses wireless radio technology. You don't have to make a 'call' like you do with WAP; you should effectively be always connected.
OK, I'm convinced. When's it out?
As usual, the Japanese are getting it first (this year) and a roll-out is expected in Europe and America in 2002. It'll probably cost serious wonga; don't expect consumer-level 3G gadgets until 2003.

SAFE SURFING FOR KIDS

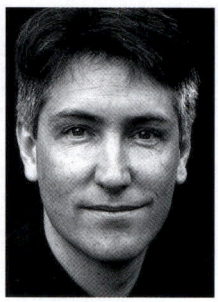
Leading left-leaning think-tank the IPPR (Institute of Public Policy Research) is suggesting that children should take the computing equivalent of a cycling proficiency test to make logging-on a safer experience.

The IPPR claims parental awareness of the dangers of the Internet is far too low. It advises the introduction of a test which would give children a firm understanding of what to trust, how to respond to strangers in chat rooms and how to get the most out of the Web.

With Internet connectivity being added to a range of devices from TV sets to games consoles, the odds are that children will start exploring the Internet away from parental supervision. Whether an 'Information SuperHighway Code' is enough to protect them from dangerous individuals is another matter entirely.

Jon Casimir

OPINION CELEBRITY STALKING IN THE CYBER-AGE



Hands up everyone who cries real tears when celebrities have their privacy invaded. None of you? Not one? Gee, you're a heartless bunch. I mean, celebrities are people, too. Well, some of them are, anyway.

And now, thanks to some new Net-based technology, the odds of famous lives remaining uninvaded are dwindling even further. UPOC (***www.upoc.com***) is a New York site for 'wireless communities': groups of people who use WAP technology to send short text and voice messages to each other's mobile phones and pagers, message board-style.

Members can join existing strands or start one of their own. There are message groups catering to most obsessions, from snowboarding to television to dumb George W Bush quotes. To date, the most popular is 'NYC celebrity sightings', which, at the time of writing, has more than 1,200 members.

True to its name, the group exists purely for the purpose of recording glimpses of the famous as they scuttle through the underbrush of Manhattan. 'This is not celebrity chat!' the group's page warns. 'Please, no minor celebrities, no fake celebrities, no friends who you think should be celebrities!'

Victimising the rich and famous can be difficult and time-consuming, as I've found out myself

It averages three sightings a day. One message finds Henry Winkler in a pharmacy in midtown Manhattan. Another pinpoints Uma Thurman's whereabouts to Union Square. A third spots James Woods in the Rockefeller Centre.

The sort of breathless fandom that would drive people to share their sightings sounds insignificant at first, but if you pause to consider it, what sets this wireless community apart from all previous celeb-based media activity is that it happens in real time and real space.

Sure, you used to be able to read the gossip pages and find out which celeb had been spotted where, but now, well, someone is telling you that if you head for a particular street corner or café right now, you may be able to actually see/hear/touch/taste/smell that person.

Clearly, this sort of messaging could be a boon for paparazzi, who could enlist the services of hundreds, possibly thousands, of unpaid and unwitting scouts. Like tow-truck drivers, they could just sit back and wait for the spotter's call before hotfooting to wherever the prey is meant to be.

Equally clearly, if this technology takes off, it could make celebrity stalking a lot easier. Victimising the rich and famous can be difficult and time-consuming, as I've found out myself on many occasions. Now, it's just gotten that much simpler. Until the celebs themselves start posting bogus sightings as a way of throwing people off the scent. Or hiring people to do it. And on that thought, if surveillance technology keeps on improving, could identity protection be the wave of the future? Could the media bodyguard be just around the corner?

Next time you're hanging around between meetings, check out what a Palm Powered™ handheld can do for you. Take the Palm™ Vx, IIIc or m100 handhelds for example. With the optional Mobile Internet Kit you can send and receive e-mails or SMS, or use the Web Clipping Applications to access the best of the net from virtually anywhere*. And we mean anywhere. With a Palm Powered handheld and the Mobile Internet Kit, you just take the Internet with you – it's that simple.

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Goldie: on his best form on a wet course

Online betting gets fishy

Keen to enliven the jaded palate of the betting public, William Hill is now offering punters the chance to gamble on online goldfish races. The respected bookie is betting that bored gamblers will consider a flutter on the fishy races – and even if they don't it might draw a few more visitors to the large online betting presence of the company.

William Hill plans to run two races per day on the Web site. Punters place bets by credit card on which fish they think will be the first to swim under a bridge in a specially-constructed race tank. They can then check back later and see where their fishy friend placed. So confident are the bookies on the success of this particular enterprise that they're planning to build up a form book for the fish. If you fancy a flutter, you can find the site at ***www.willhill.com.***

Xbox: doesn't quite mark the spot

Microsoft Xbox won't permit Web browsing

Microsoft has announced that its much-hyped Xbox console won't have full Web-browsing capability when it hits the shops next year. The Xbox, which has no keyboard or mouse, will be used for online gaming only. At the Xbox UK press launch, global manager J Allard said: 'The Xbox won't be about URLs and sites. There will be no Web browser as we want to concentrate on gaming.'

Ironically, the news comes as belief grows that Sony will power up the PlayStation 2 for browsability. In the rush to launch PS2 before Christmas, Sony elected not to build in a modem, but the Japanese version now includes email and a virtual keyboard. Rumour has it the European PS2s will be online before the year is out. See page 16 for more details.

PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS

Tim Richardson

OPINION THOU SHALT NOT LIVE BY WEB ALONE

Mitch Maddox. Remember him? On 1 January 2000 he locked himself in a house somewhere in Dallas and pledged to stay there for a whole year on his own. His only contact with the outside world was the Net. He had to furnish the house, buy his groceries and fulfil his need for human interaction all via a PC and some cable. If he couldn't get it online, he didn't get it at all.Oh, and before he began his hermit lifestyle, he changed his name to DotComGuy. Remember him now?

The twenty-something UPS computing systems manager lead a regular life until he tipped his world upside down and decided to throw himself at the mercy of the Net. No longer plain old Mitch, he'd become DotComGuy, the man who lived his life online. It's the kind of metamorphosis more at home in a comic book. Except there's nothing comic about a guy whose life revolves totally around a PC. Just imagine what he did every day: Day 1: DCG sits at his PC to check out the Web. Day 78: DCG checks out the Web while seated at his PC. Day 152: Seated at his PC, DCG checks out the Web. Day 238: DCG checks out his PC seated at the Web.

When he emerged 12 months later, it was only the fact that he'd proposed online that got him noticed

Enough already. DCG began his experiment at a time when Net fever was as its peak. People were outdoing themselves at what could be done online. It was as if the Net needed a reason to exist and people like DCG were out to find it. When he entered his self-imposed exile, he was the subject of much media interest. When he emerged 12 months later, it was only the fact that he proposed to a woman he met online that got him noticed at all. He'd been forgotten.

But you don't need to lock yourself away for a year to understand how the Web works – or how it works for you. Last year I had a crack at doing my weekly shop online. Some people swear by it. Changed their lives completely, they said.

The technology was fine. Once I'd found my way around and created a shopping list, it was easy. Trying to visualise what one kilogram of mushrooms looked like was slightly more problematic, but I got round it. I sent off my order and the next day it arrived. Terrific. Except, the order was minus the organic decaffeinated Earl Grey teabags I'd asked for. Well, that's fine, I can live without those. But where were the tins of tomatoes necessary for a pasta dish I planned that night? When I called the supermarket they told me there weren't any in stock. Come off it. A tin of tomatoes? They're having me on.

So, I did what I had to do. I went down the shops and bought a tin of tomatoes to go with my pasta. I accept it defeated the whole object of shopping online. Perhaps I should have been a bit more creative and cooked something else for dinner instead. But what the heck – it's not as if my name is DotComGuy or anything.

thenetnow»

://Heroes & Zeros – the best and the worst of the Web

The homeless: on a site near you

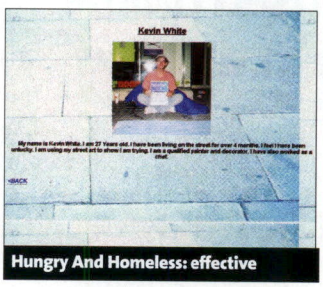
HERO ODDEST WEB IDEA

'Spare 10p for a modem?'

WHEN YOU'VE FALLEN UPON TIMES so hard that they've left you hungry and homeless on the streets of London, it's a lot easier to despair than think of a way out of it. But 26-year-old 'Steve' had an idea: harness the Net to get himself and other homeless people off the streets.

After saving the money given to him on the street to buy a cheap laptop from the Portobello Road market, Steve wrote a 'Hungry and Homeless' screensaver to attract attention – and a passing childhood friend with some Internet knowledge helped him set up ***www.hungryandhomeless.co.uk***. The site showcases pictures of homeless people looking for work: it's an old Catch 22 that bosses are loathe to take on employees without addresses but it's hard to buy a house without an income. Establishing the site has got Steve out of that trap: he's been offered a job and a place to stay, and now he wants to help others out of the poverty trap.

'We would like to be able to offer people training, says Steve. 'We just need a place to work from and we can help even more people.'



Hungry And Homeless: effective

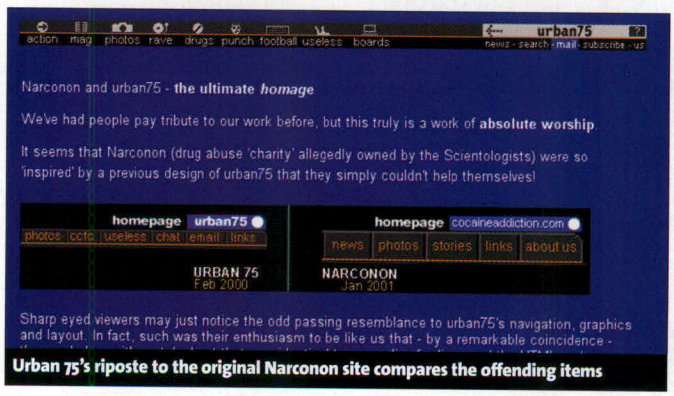
ZERO BIGGEST RIP-OFF

Scientologists 'stole my site'

IT'S NOT BEEN A GOOD MONTH FOR Scientology. Not only have golden couple Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman split, but a charity site with connections to the Church has been accused of lifting its design wholesale from a decidedly leftfield site.

The popular Urban 75 site (***www.urban75.com***) describes itself as an 'eco-rave-protest-zine'. So when its design seemed to be closely mirrored by the anti-drugs Narconon site (***www.narconon.org***), Urban 75 chief Mike Slocombe got an email from a fan. 'It was like, "what are you doing writing for Scientologists?"'.

Slocombe sent a dozen letters to the site owners but only received anonymous answers through the Urban75 feedback form, offering, says Slocombe, to 'help me through my problem'. The design of the Narconon site has since changed.



Urban 75's riposte to the original Narconon site compares the offending items

PICTURES: PA

Lego 2001: oddly menacing

HERO BEST SPOOF

Web Space oddity

THE LATE STANLEY KUBRICK'S *2001: A Space Odyssey* has been Lego'd by Welsh-based Spite Your Face Productions (***www.spiteyourface.com***), the masterminds behind All of the Dead (featured in Heroes & Zeroes, January 2001).

The minute-long ONE: A Space Odyssey, downloadable from ***www.spiteyourface.com/one/film.html***, was commissioned by Edinburgh-based collective 360 Contemporary Arts as part of a wider project honouring Kubrick's masterpiece. Spite Your Face's Tim Drage and Tony Mines appealed to The Lego Group for materials, as well as various beneficiaries across the country to fund their project. Retro Lego pieces were pillaged from both Mines' own collection and ***www.lego-rebuilders.com***. The result? Something only slightly more confusing (and just as impressive) as the original. Hal never looked so menacing (or isometrical) – and the opening monkey sequence finds a new comic edge.

ZERO WORST TAKEOVER

No more Deja view for Usenet fans

WE AT THE NET HAVE LAUDED Google in the past, but we're not afraid to have a pop when they do badly. It all seemed perfect when the world's best search engine acquired discussion-board service Deja (***www.deja.com***), after rumours that Deja was running out of cash. However, it seems Google has badly bungled the takeover of the venerable archive.

It started well when Google promised to extend its search capabilities to half a million Usenet messages. But it went wrong when Google didn't migrate Deja's front end with it, rendering the archive all but useless. Saved shortcuts now point to the Google beta Usenet search engine. You can't follow threads, or search by hierarchies, because they're broken. Oh dear.

Defending his company, Google CEO Larry Page claimed 'the costs of keeping Deja's front end running were too high. 'I feel for all the users – I would be upset too.'

egg: invest

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Europe M&G European Index Tracker

Technology Close FTSE techMARK

UK HSBC FTSE All Share Index

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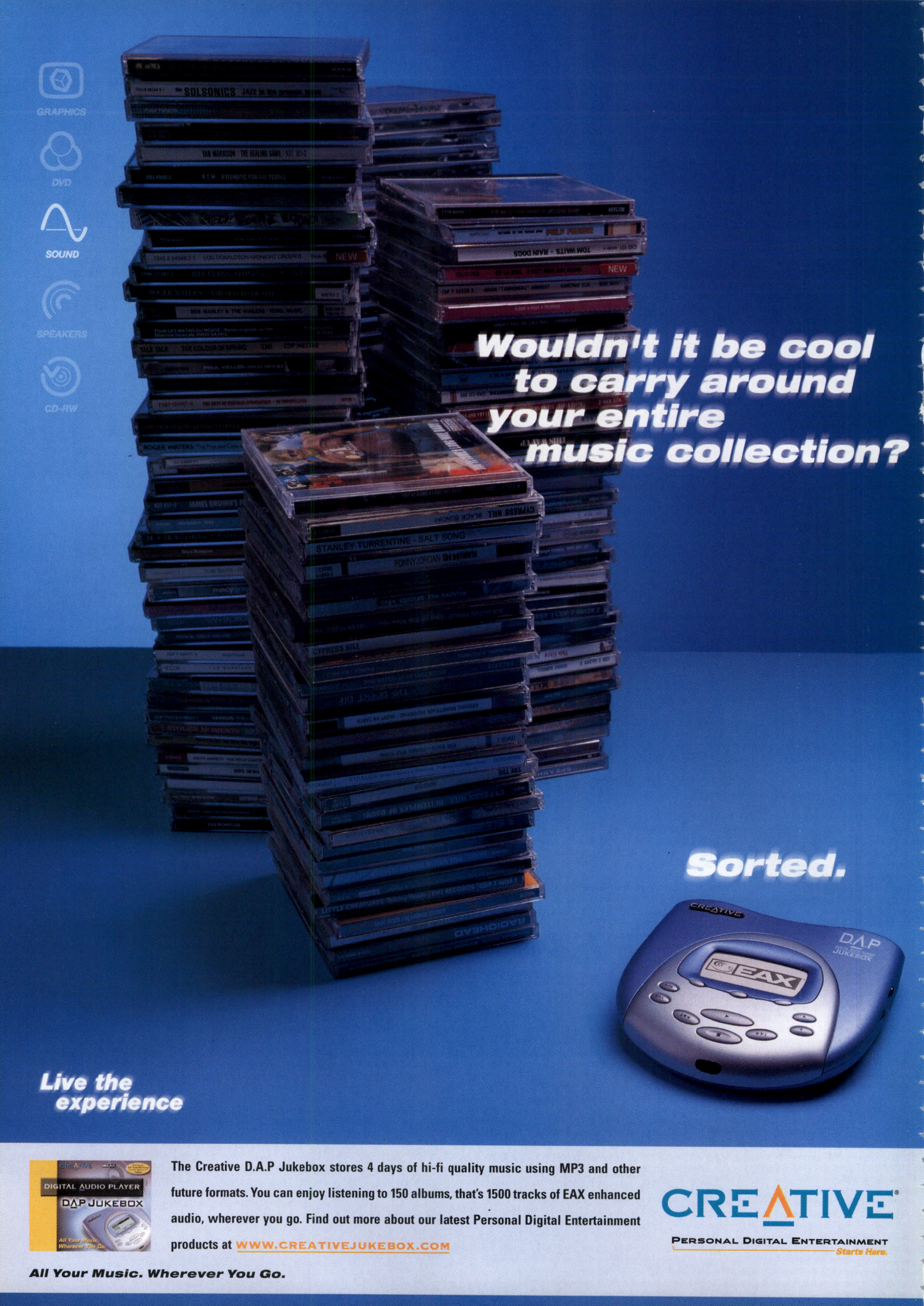
GRAPHICS
DVD
SOUND
SPEAKERS
CD-RW
Wouldn't it be cool to carry around your entire music collection?
Sorted.
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EAX
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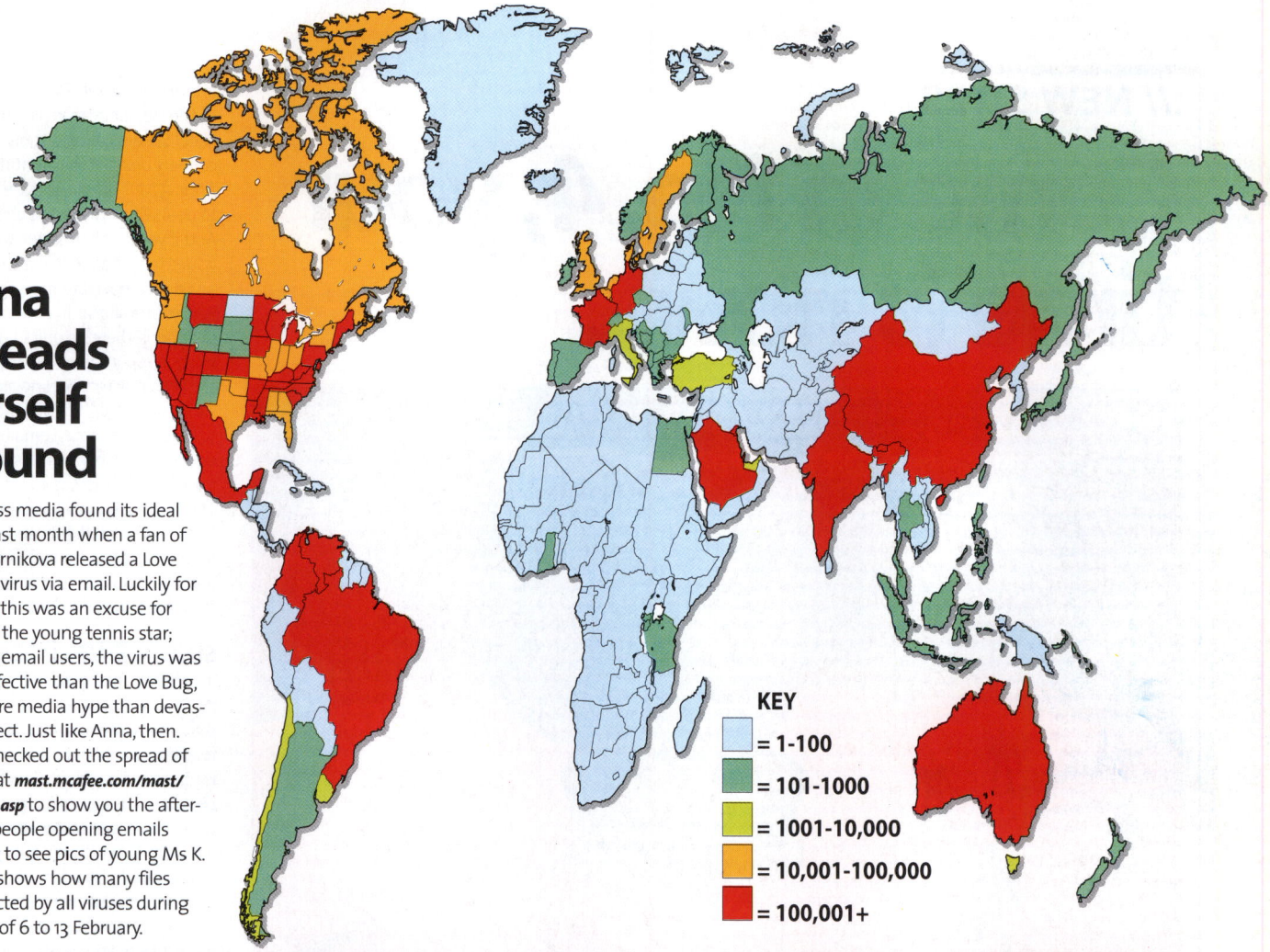
:// The Web in charts and graphs

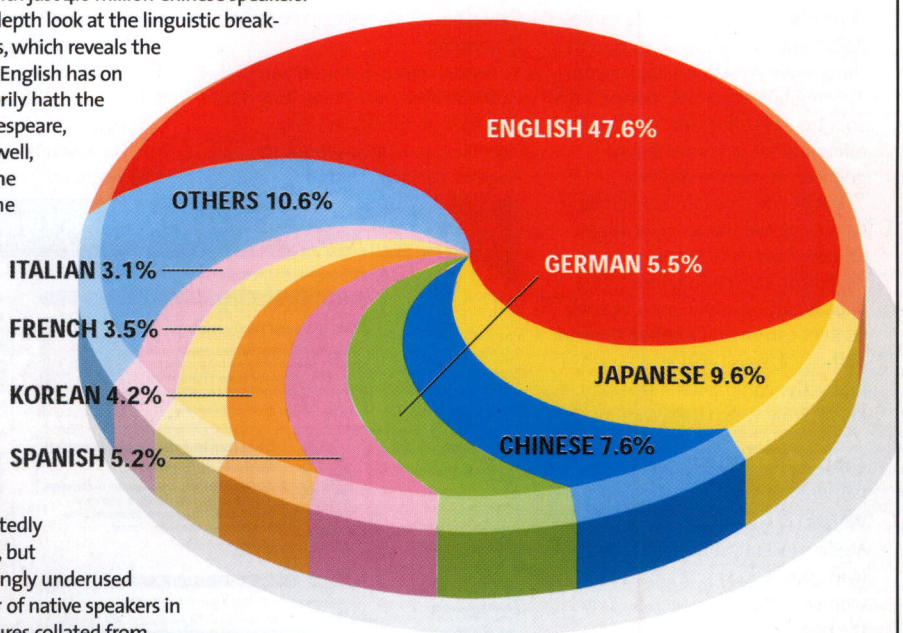


Anna spreads herself around

The mass media found its ideal virus last month when a fan of Anna Kournikova released a Love Bug-style virus via email. Luckily for the press, this was an excuse for photos of the young tennis star; luckily for email users, the virus was far less effective than the Love Bug, being more media hype than devastating effect. Just like Anna, then. Still, we checked out the spread of the virus at ***mast.mcafee.com/mast/mass_map.asp*** to show you the after-effect of people opening emails expecting to see pics of young Ms K. The map shows how many files were infected by all viruses during the week of 6 to 13 February.

No habla Inglesi? You're in trouble then...

In last month's Stat Attack we told you that the Internet has more than 91 million English-speaking users compared with just 4.6 million Chinese speakers. Here's a more in-depth look at the linguistic breakdown of Net users, which reveals the stranglehold that English has on Internet usage. Verily hath the language of Shakespeare, Larkin and Bush (well, sort of) become the lingua franca of the Internet. Which must cheese off the French, renowned for Government-level attempts to halt the anglicization of their own language. Oriental tongues account for expectedly sizeable amounts, but Spanish is surprisingly underused given the number of native speakers in the Americas. Figures collated from *www.glreach.com/globstats*



ILLUSTRATIONS: ALAN ELDRIDGE

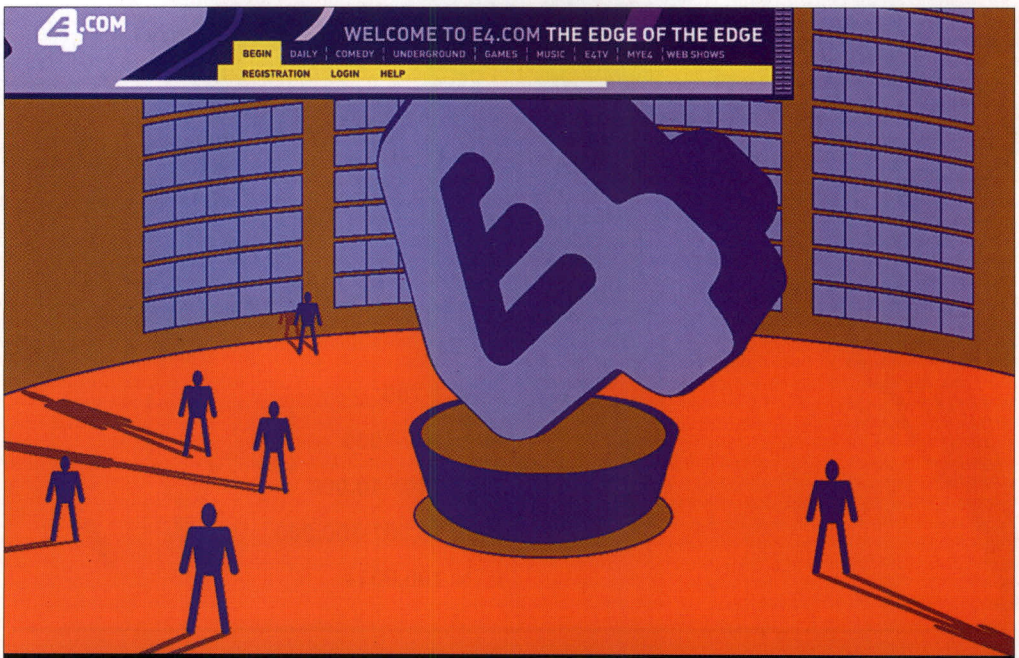
QUICK FIGURES

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT...»

- One in five UK Internet users, 2.4 million people, visited online gaming sites during December, says NetValue (***www.netvalue.com***). However, only 194,000 took the plunge into playing online
- **UK PC ownership and Internet penetration is higher than elsewhere in Europe, says BMRB (*www.bmrb.co.uk*), but Brits spend 20 percent less time online than their continental counterparts**
- Tony's den is a popular place: The 10 Downing Street Web site (***www.number-10.gov.uk***) has had more than 99 million hits since its relaunch nine months ago
- **Almost a third of UK homes with a Net connection are using some form of unmetered access, says Oftel (*www.oftel.gov.uk*)**
- More than 11 million Britons access the Internet from home, says NetValue. That's 3 million up on last year's figure

:// NEW SITES

Come in No. 4, your time is now...



E4's Web site promises games, mini-shows, interactivity and advice to take your trousers off and have a good chat with the boss

REVIEWED
E4
www.e4.com
FEMAIL
www.femail.co.uk
SONGPLAYER
www.songplayer.com
BBC RELIGION
www.bbc.co.uk/religion

The Web is not yet proven as an entertainment medium.' Those aren't the words of a sniping cynic but a man who's doing more than most to change that situation: Andy Anson, head of strategic planning and interactive at E4.com, the Internet arm of Channel 4's new digital-only channel. The official site launch is in March, after *the net* goes to press, but initial signs are that the site will be well worth bookmarking.

As you'd expect from C4's existing excellent Web presence, the site (***www.e4.com***) looks the business, with Flash graphics giving you a variety of options. Importantly, E4 simulcasts its cross-platform show *Banzai* on TV and the Net on Sunday nights, and E4.com even offers a *Banzai* WAP game. There are games galore and mini-shows exclusive to the site. We loved the *Trigger Happy TV* Stressbuster (sample advice: 'Take your trousers off, go into the boss's office and tell him what's been going on in your life this year').

But besides the famous names, E4 is using the site as an incubator for new talent and shows, such as Zeppotron's *Office Romance*. 'We're already talking about what E4.com content can go on TV before the end of the year,' says Channel 4's head of interactive commissioning Stevan Keane. Truly, watch this (Web) space.

ONE FOR THE LAYDEEZ

Proof that good things do come in Web packages: Associated New Media's recently-launched Femail (***www.femail.co.uk***), recognises that women's interests extend beyond the basic make-up-and-men conundrums. That's not to say that beauty and sex aren't on the agenda; it's just that they're joined by more pressing issues such as money, Web news, health and career advice, and parenting.

Femail comes from competent stock (ANM is part of the *Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday, Evening Standard* and *Metro* group), so women can trust that the information is reliable. Contributors to the site range from celebrity chef Nigel Slater dishing out his latest culinary designs to parenting expert Anne Atkins offering advice on how to deal with hyperactive children. And if you'd rather natter about your issues to someone in the same boat, an easy-to-navigate message board is at your disposal. In emergency situations, there's a quick link that lets you report abusive situations to the Web masters. Feeling alone can vanish with the click of a mouse.

On a lighter note, Femail provides celebrity gossip and horoscopes courtesy of Princess Di's astrologer. The travel section allows you to book insurance, flights and accommodation online, while the TV and Radio section furnishes tips for at-home entertainment.

SING A SIMPLE SONG

It's entirely fitting given the do-it-yourself nature of the Internet that a new site has popped up teaching you how to play guitar or keyboards. Songplayer (***www.songplayer.com***) describes its music tuition as 'easier, faster and better'; a maxim to which the entire Net would love to lay claim because it avoids the tiresome process of having to learn to read sheet music. (Take it from your guitar-totin' reviewer, you don't need to read dots to play songs.)

Songplayer has more than 4,000 songs on its files, including all the tracks on the recent Beatles *1* CD, and it works alongside your own CD collection. Look up the tune you want to learn, sling in your CD and it'll tell you how Noel plays that riff or Elton tickles those ivories.

Speaking of Mr Gallagher, if you're into Oasis and bought *Familiar to Millions* on DVD then you've already

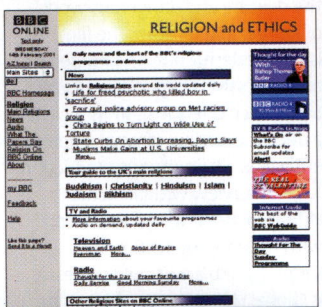
Femail: providing the modern woman with more than just make-up and men

got the software on there. If not, a quick visit to the site lets you download the software so you'll be playing like Hendrix and Handel rolled into one. And even if your new skill doesn't take you on the long and winding road to the top of the charts, there's always money to be earned from busking...

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

BBC Online has added Religion and Ethics to its site, at ***www.bbc.co.uk/religion***. Serving the UK's six largest religious communities – Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs – the site provides both the latest headlines and historical background for each religion. The Religion and Ethics section also gives you the opportunity to examine the similarities and differences between the faiths.

According to the Beeb's Director of Media, Ashley Highfield, '[the site] supports our policy of building



BBC Online gets the religion bug

strong communities among groups without a strong representation on UK Web sites.' And it certainly does provide a wealth of information for members of the six featured faiths (as well as interested parties). Religious calendars and key dates of worship are listed, plus a glossary explaining what the traditional practices represent and when they were conceived. Links to relevant content on external sites are also provided.

As one would expect from BBC Online, the site is easy to use. The homepage leads you to the news sections and the separate areas for the featured religions. Fans of Radio 4 will enjoy the RealAudio downloads of *Thought for the Day* and *The Sunday Programme*, while telly addicts can quick-click to find out which religious programmes the BBC is airing and when. And if Thora Hird's on them. There's also a message board where people of all faiths can chat together.

://ONLINE GAMING

Planetside takes online gaming to a new level

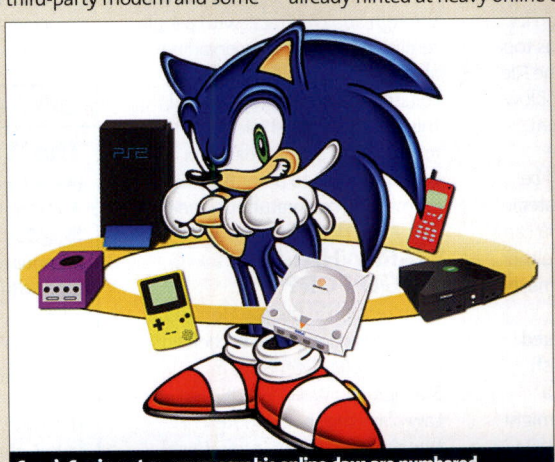
PlayStation prepares to skin the hedgehog

REVIEWED
PLAYSTATION2 ONLINE
www.ergo.co.jp/news/egbrowser.html
PLANETSIDE
www.station.sony.com/planetside
THE MATRIX
www.shiny.com

ONLINE DREAM FAILS SEGA

It wasn't enough. Despite being the true pioneer in bringing online gaming to the living rooms of the masses, Dreamcast is doomed. Sega has confirmed that production is to end on 31 March and the European arm of the company is already getting cagey on just how long the European servers for the brilliant *Quake 3 Arena* and incredible soon-to-be-released RPG *Phantasy Star Online* will be kept running. Support for the machine has been promised to the end of the year, but whispers are circulating that the cost of hosting all those lovely online Dreamcast games will be too much for the company to bear for the rest of 2001.

Ever the opportunist, the Japanese PlayStation 2 has gone online courtesy of a third-party modem and some nifty browser software from super-Japanese developer, Koei. Everything you'd expect from a narrowband console service is included, such as email and a virtual keyboard. Although no-one's actually admitted to coding a browser for the PAL console, you can bet your maiden aunt that PlayStation 2 in Europe will be online far sooner than you think, with broadband to follow towards the end of the year.



Sega's Sonic: not so smug now his online days are numbered

INSIDE PLANETSIDE

Just when you thought PC online gaming was just so last century, along comes a title that will change everything. *Planetside* comes from the same stable as US online fantasy smash *EverQuest* and promises to be everything good boys deserve. Set in a dark and techie future, the game casts each player in a 'safe-zone', with their own apartment, social life and the like. Boring? Not when you don power armour, team up with whoever else is up for a ruck in your city, pile out into the surrounding countryside with more weaponry than Kitchener's Gallipoli effort and play something along the lines of *Quake 3 Team Arena* crossed with *Halo*. As Verant is owned by Sony, expect a PlayStation 2 version sometime next year. Play will be housed on Sony's ***www.station.com***. Home site ***www.station.sony.com/planetside*** is going to get hit to death when the game releases later this year.

SHINY TAKES THE RED PILL

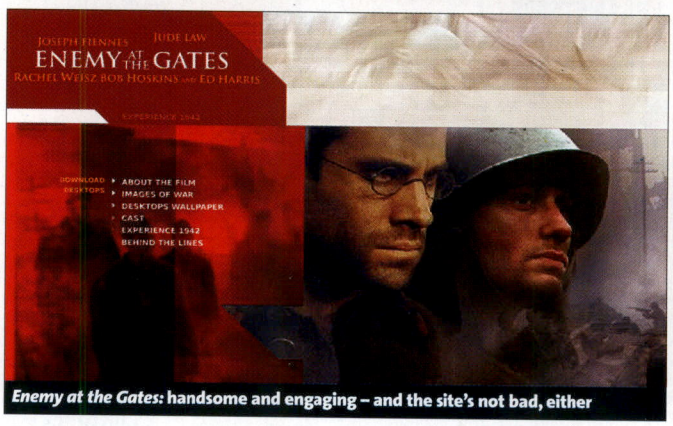
Shiny Entertainment is to make the game version of the movie everyone loves to love, *The Matrix*. Sony has already hinted at heavy online elements for the inevitable PlayStation 2 version, just right for that lovely broadband adapter for the end of the year. As you might expect, nothing's been leaked yet, but if the movie's anything to go by, online gaming was never so exciting. Especially because Carrie Anne Moss flaunts leather in it. And you get to do kung fu. The release is expected to be simultaneous with the launch of the movie sequel later this year.

:// MOVIES

Torture, kidnap, war and Costner

REVIEWED
Thirteen Days
www.thirteen-days.com
Enemy at the Gates
www.enemyatthegatesmovie.com
Proof of Life
www.proofoflife.com

Thirteen Days: **plenty of gritty pouting ahoy, courtesy of our Kevin...**



Enemy at the Gates: **handsome and engaging – and the site's not bad, either**

LET'S ICE CUBA

Promoting a movie via a Web site is a double-edged sword. Bad films can have great sites and the decent ones sometimes settle for a mere trailer. Take truly exceptional sites like *The Claim*: it's not the greatest film ever, but its Web space was crammed with insightful and regular features recording the filmmaking process.

Yet, for every one of these there is a tepid and tedious affair. Usually, the most entertaining and worthy sites are ones that augment the usual PR flattery with a host of informative features that harness the Web's strengths and (hopefully) won't fail to enhance your enjoyment of said flick. Historical dramas are always a good opportunity for this, and with *Thirteen Days* you'll get a richly informative and sometimes chilling look at the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the closest we ever came to nuclear war.

Despite offering no HTML version, this Flash-heavy site scores on its stylish presentation as well as top-notch historical data, with The File Depository giving a blow-by-blow account of this terrifying event. Flash game fans with a taste for intelligent challenges will be well catered for with the Strategic Military Exercise, in which you can co-ordinate armed forces to either avert war or, if you're feeling nasty, blow the Russkies to hell.

The film's point is hammered home with two excellent Flash elements. War Simulation is a detailed animation of what might have happened if the peace talks failed – feel the lump in your throat as the world gets annihilated in a matter of minutes. Where Were You In '62 is a great gimmick that offers a real perspective of the crisis through audio extracts with people reminiscing about the pervading atmosphere of doom. Well constructed and rich with detail, this is an attractive historical resource and a great teaser for what promises to be vintage Kev drama. With no gratuitous nudity.

WAR: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

From tension in the corridors of power to action in the battlefield: *Enemy at the Gates* is set in Stalingrad in World War II. Jude Law plays the sharpshooter transformed into an inspirational hero by propaganda officer Joseph Fiennes. As a result, Law must engage in a duel to the death with his veteran Nazi opposite, played by Ed Harris. If that sounds tasty, then its incredibly handsome, engaging site (***www.enemyatthegatesmovie.com***) is guaranteed to impress. Offering so much so stylishly, it's a pity that it only comes Flash-intensive.

Following the propaganda theme, if you register you can receive regular emails with news from the front. The site also features a slew of essays, video and audio; which not only highlights the history of this conflict, but of the startling effort that went into this production. This is reflected in the graphic content: loads of brooding pics of Jude 'n' Joe, plus a bevvy of production stills showcasing the vivid sets.

'GET IN THE BACK OF THE VAN'

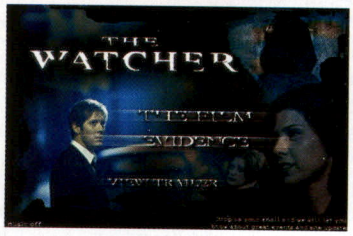
When you're on holiday, the last thing you want is to have that much-anticipated day-trip interrupted with sudden, violent kidnap and subsequent torture. *Proof of Life*, starring rom-com queen Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe deals with the delicate and dangerous work of kidnap and ransom. The film isn't wonderful, but it's salvaged by an impressive site (***www.proofoflife.com***) which offers insight as well as a decent overview of what, apparently, was a tumultuous production.

An interview with an actual kidnap victim gives added spice, with a harrowing testimony. Helpfully, and amusingly, there is Global Hotspots, which gives a detailed look at the countries most likely to nab you, the kind of people who'll do it, the demands they make, and how much you're worth as ransom. So if your monetary value interests you, book that flight to Columbia now.

Elsewhere, the site offers a resource of related material, such as the world's leading Kidnap/Ransom Insurance Brokers (just in case, you know). As gritty as you'd expect.

DOT COM DUFFER OF THE MONTH:

The Watcher
(***www.thewatchermovie.com***)



A site promoting a serial killer flick? So, that'll be black backgrounds and ominous music, then. While doe-eyed Keanu admirers struggled to contend with their idol exchanging hero roles for mad psychopath, *The Watcher* site is an effortless, underwhelming affair. Certainly, there are Flash and HTML offerings with all the usual interactive elements (screensavers, etc), but the rest is vapid PR puff: the cast and essays which trades every cliché in the book ('we had to get into this guy's mind!').

:// MUSIC

Everything mustn't go, say Manics

REVIEWED
Manic Street Preachers
www.manicstreetpreachers.com
Stereophonics
www.stereophonics.co.uk
Puffy in court
www.CourtTV.com/trials/puffy

MANIC PANIC

It all seemed like such a good idea. You're the Manic Street Preachers; you're on the way back; you need a new shtick. You've done generational terrorist, you've done nihilistic soothsayer, you've gone as deep into Britrock as you care to paddle, and the old school welfare state sloganeering is now wearing a bit thin. So you look to new technologies: take a few of your tracks, put them on your Web site for a limited stream as a reward to your loyal fans, and build interest and expectation around the forthcoming record. Chuck in a launch-party in Cuba to maintain your politicised, neo-Marxist roots, and bingo – even if the album is shocking, you get a red star for keeping it real.

But then it begins to slide. Somehow a fairly adept, though not extraordinary, hacker manages to access not just the two singles that are on ***www.manicstreetpreachers.com***, but at least five additional album tracks from a Sony server. Suddenly the tracks are downloadable. Suddenly there's panic. All streams are suspended.

Then the big dual single launch date is brought forward. The *Pet Sounds* off-cut that is *So Why So Sad* and the not altogether unpleasant John Cale-infused *Found That Soul* are now to be released on 26 February, while the album, *Know Your Enemy*, is now to appear on 19 March. Poor reasons are offered – Comic Relief single release amongst them – but they don't wash.

Then the entire album appears on Napster, all Manics-collecting account holders are kicked off and a new Metallica situation threatens to break out. Add a few badly conceived remarks from Nicky Wire ('I don't think people should kid themselves that Napster is like Oxfam'), and suddenly the boys from the Valleys look like three overweight men approaching middle-age who have little of worth to say and a poor way of saying it. It could be the beginning of the end.

STEREO SEPARATION?

In rather less of a twist are the Manics' fellow Welshmen, The Stereophonics. Their third album, *Just Enough Education to Perform (JEEP)*, is released on 9 April; their approach to the Net has been altogether more canny and clever. While they have made some tracks available for streaming on ***www.stereophonics.co.uk***, they have also made fans aware, through the same official site, of when a 'leak' has allowed the material to appear on Napster. If the tracks only appear for a weekend, it shows the band (or more likely their label and management) read the current climate well enough to know that it's foolish to try and maintain a Big Brother-like stranglehold on new material. Better to appear generous and also savvy – the fans will still buy it on release regardless, and will feel more of a link to their heroes.

Stereophonics: the Welsh band it's still alright to admit to liking...

PUFF: THE MAGIC WEBCAM

A current must-see on the Net and tied completely to the future of rap is CourtTV.com's coverage of the Sean 'Puffy' Combs trial. To quickly recap: on 26 December 1999, Puffy, his then-girlfriend Jennifer Lopez and a few mates were on a night out in Club New York on Times Square. There was a row between Puffy and a man by the name of Scar. Scar thought Puffy was a little too big for his boots, told him so, and threw a roll-up of several thousand dollars at him. And this is where it gets messy.

According to some witnesses, Puffy drew a gun. According to others, Jamal 'Shyne' Barrow, a young rapper signed to Puffy's Bad Boy Recordings, drew a gun. Shots were fired, bullets ricocheted and three people were hit. Puffy, a bodyguard and Miss J-Lo took off in a People Carrier, ran a few red lights, got involved in a police chase and were eventually hauled in. An illegal 9mm Smith and Weston, thought to have been involved in the shooting, was found under the passenger seat of their car. Shyne was also arrested, though separately.

Fast forward to January 2001 and you have the first great trial of the new century – guns, car chases, money, power, beautiful women, Johnnie Cochran on the defence team, allegations of perjury, jealousy and bribery. As you read this, Manhattan Superior Court will be under siege from the world's press. Puffy could get 15 years, Shyne could get 25 – and you can see it all on the Web. Thank God for new technology...

WORDS: PATRICK GARRATT (GAMES); DECLAN ALBISTON (MUSIC); DANNY GRAYDON (MOVIES)

discoveries»

://Our month using the Web

WEIRD PAUL SIMPSON

A whole new you online...

WHILE RESEARCHING A BOOK ON contract killers online (hey, it's something to do while the wife's watching *Changing Rooms*, *Home Improvements*, etc) I found a spy's manual on the art of disguise (***www.apbnews.com/media/gfiles/spy/file.html***). Having been compared (in chronological order) to Kenny Everett, Homer Simpson and Derby County manager Jim Smith, I've always found the disguise business intriguing.

The manual was written by Antonio Mendez (whose job title was 'chief of disguises for the CIA'), with the aid of Max Factor. It covers everything from fake moustaches to plastic surgery. So, I thought, why not have a go? Not at the plastic surgery you understand (too impoverished and squeamish) – but at the master of disguise stuff. Who knows, it might even come in handy for the book...

Some of the advice is, frankly, dodgy. There is a recurring theme about altering the appearance of Jews (how they can straighten their hair or have surgery to change what Mendez calls their 'racial characteristics'). The manual also contains some marvellous throwaway pieces of advice such as 'never sleep in a hairpiece unless absolutely necessary.' Thanks for the tip, Antonio.

Despairing of finding a convincing hairpiece to cover a forehead twice the size of Homer's, I tried the simple stuff first. Standing 5ft 10in barefoot, I did as the manual recommended and tore up bits of newspaper and stuck them in the heels of my shoes. This was supposed to add 2.5 inches to my height and had the added bonus, Mendez claimed, of changing my walk and posture. He was spot-on there: with newsprint in my heels I walked as gingerly as a man whose ill-fitting shoes are tearing strips of flesh off his heel with every step. My posture changed, too: I looked like a man who had been hung up in the wardrobe overnight. When I pulled my trouser belt up (the manual promised it would make my legs look longer) I looked like a fashion victim.

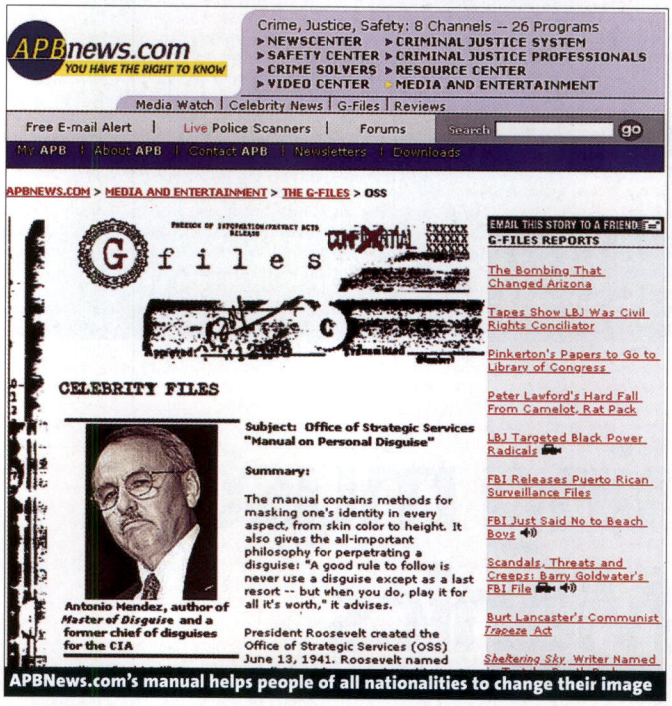
Mildly encouraged, I tried to disguise my most prominent feature – my nose. I traipsed off to the hardware store to buy rubber tubing 'one-half an inch in outside diameter' (the manual was very specific about this) and cut it into half-inch long pieces. Tentatively, I pushed a plug up each nostril taking great care, as Mendez reminded me, 'not to let them slip into the nasal cavity.'

My nose fully plugged, I looked in the mirror. Mendez was right: my nose had widened. Sadly, as it was naturally pretty wide, it was now only slightly narrower than my face. I also now spoke like someone in urgent need of a packet of Tunes.

The unplugging wasn't easy: at one point the left plug seemed to have fallen into the very nasal cavity Mendez had warned me against. Faced with the prospect of a lifetime sniffing like a coke fiend, I didn't panic. Without getting too technical, some jiggling and probing dislodged the plug so I could breathe easily.

After that I decided against plucking my eyebrows. Nor could I change my skin colour, having none of the rusty iron Mendez recommended for dying your skin. Mendez would have flunked me for this, as he warns: 'when white officers and men go in with native troops, it is usually the white faces that Japs shoot at first.'

At this point I decided there must be easier ways to change my identity (my son once pointed to Homer and shouted 'Daddy!'). I already have the hairstyle; a lot more beers and a little less exercise and I'd have the physique, too. Mind you, I'd still need rusty iron to dye my skin yellow.



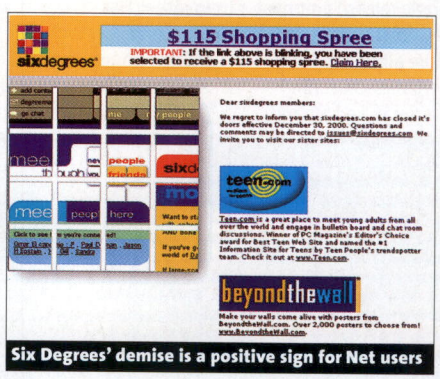
APBNews.com's manual helps people of all nationalities to change their image

SOCIETY ROBERT JEFFERY

In cyberspace, no-one can hear you talk

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DOT COM closures in recent months went with a whimper rather than a bang. Six Degrees (*www.sixdegrees.com*) shut its doors for the last time on New Year's Eve, its dream of creating the ultimate global community looking rather dishevelled.

The site's mission was typically ambitious: sign up, provide a plethora of personal details and join in the fun. There were chat rooms, message boards and, best of all, a huge map linking every member to every other (hence the old 'six degrees' bit), the idea being that making new friends or business contacts could be achieved simply by 'connecting' with another member. In short, it was a site you'd never need to leave: a bit like a working men's club for the world, if you will.



Six Degrees' demise is a positive sign for Net users

I actually quite enjoyed being a Six Degrees member; and I wasn't alone: there were several million of us, all 'related' in one way or another. Like most, however, occasionally checking my 'Degreemail' and lazily flicking through my message boards was as far as my involvement ever went. The idea was fine; the practice wasn't worth the trouble.

So is Six Degrees' demise evidence of further isolation among Net users? Certainly not. In fact, it's a distinctly positive sign: the people coming online now don't need new Net friends, and they don't have the time to swap emails with a retired basket weaver from Pennsylvania. They'll spend time online, but they want information, and they want it quickly so they can enhance their offline lives and save a bit of money.

Think about it: when have you ever met anyone in a chat room who didn't seem somehow socially inept? Who didn't almost certainly have a very dark cellar in their house nobody was allowed to see? And didn't the fact you were talking to them in the first place make you feel ever so slightly soiled by association? Welcome to the new World Wide Web – it's just like the real world...

EMusic: big act track grabbing

MUSIC

MARK PAYTON

Why the Net's got all the best tunes

After months of trying to justify the Net to Her indoors I finally hit upon a financial model that works. It began by binning our 'free' pay-as-you-go service (I'll send you a copy of the bill spent researching Matt's homework). In its place came an unmetered service that hits my Visa for £12.99 a month – but lets Matt trawl homework sites unhindered.

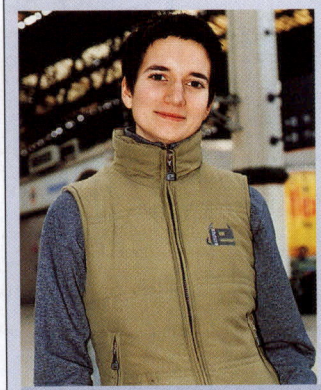
It also enables me to pursue my interests without draining the bank balance. Our PC came equipped with a CD-RW and disc-burning software; which was marvellous were it not for the fact that grabbing 5Mb MP3 music files can take 30 minutes. But now that the clock has stopped, I can snatch all the files I want.

What I needed next was a site that offered name artists (I'd even be willing to pay, as long as it was legal and reliable). Enter ***www.emusic.com***: having teamed up with the record industry, the site now offers subscriptions for under £7 a month that lets you grab tracks from big acts.

Now let's do a little maths. I'm now paying £156 a year for round-the-clock Internet access. My online music habit picks up a bill of £84, while the CD-RW discs are just over £1 a go. Which brings us to £292 a year. In return for this sum our home is fed homework help, a fix for my music addiction, a range of games, a means of keeping in touch with family abroad, and a site that the kids have no end of fun building. Want further justification? Add into the mix the homework books we'd need to buy over 12 months. Then throw in the CDs I didn't buy from HMV, the postal bills, plus the incalculable mental bill resulting from the children having nowt to occupy their minds. My case rests.

Look what we've found!

WATERLOO STATION What do London's commuters surf for when they finally get to work?



REBECCA SMITH

STUDENT

I'm in London studying for a degree in fine art, so I use Hotmail (***www.hotmail.com***) every day to email friends across the country and abroad. I also like to check out ***www.xfm.co.uk*** for gig listings.

DAVID KIRBY

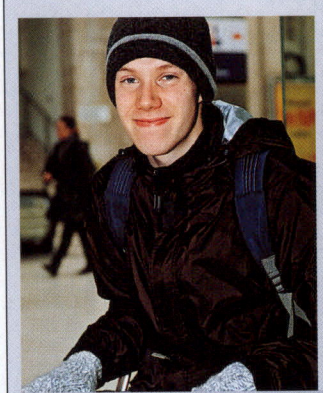
TRAIN DRIVER

I support Crystal Palace FC, so I guess their official site (***www.cpfc.co.uk***) is the one that I visit most often. I also shop and do my banking online, and sometimes look up health advice.

MARK FRETWELL

NATIONAL ACCTS MANAGER

My company provides information to different sites, such as ***www.fleetnews.net*** and ***www.auto-locate.com***, so I visit those a lot. In my spare time I look at Virgin Cars (***www.virgincars.com***).



JOHN HARRISON

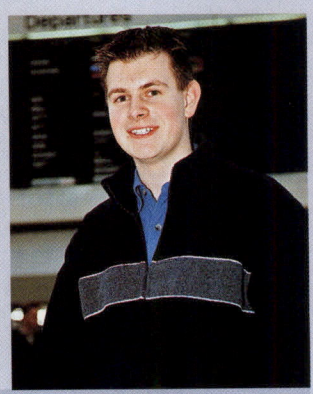
STUDENT

I download music from Napster (***www.napster.com***), and I also like to search for interviews, film and literary reviews at FindArticles.com (***www.findarticles.com***).

SIAN MORGAN

HUMAN RESOURCES

I use the Net where I work, posting employment ads online and searching for phone numbers on BT's site (***www.bt.com/phonenetuk***). I also use it to look for holidays and flights.



PETER CLARIDGE

STUDENT

I'm studying for my A-levels at the moment, but also have my own site – TheCybernet.co.uk (***www.thecybernet.co.uk***). It's mostly games, and has tons of free downloads.

JENNY COILEY

ACCOUNT MANAGER

I do a lot of my shopping online – for holidays, clothes... basically everything. But if I had to choose one site that I visit the most it would be FT.com (***www.ft.com***). I need it for my work.

RICHARD YOUNG

BAR STUDENT

I use sites such as Butterworths (***www.butterworths.co.uk***) for legal research. I also go to Reuters (***www.reuters.com***) and BBC Online (***news.bbc.co.uk***) every other day for news and information.

EDWARD ISAAC

FINANCE DIRECTOR

I work for Windmill Lane, a TV and Internet company, so I spend time online doing research. I also shop online, at Amazon (***www.amazon.co.uk***) and RM Williams Boots (***www.bootsonline.com.au***).

INTERVIEWS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: RICHARD LAWRENCE

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Dear Sir

LETTER OF THE MONTH

In answer to Jon Casimir's question (*March issue*), I cannot think of a single dot com closure that has had an effect on my Net life. However, the prominence given to these failures in the media merely serves to enhance the perception of the Internet as being untrustworthy in some quarters. This perception is further enforced by regular reports of email viruses, and people being arrested with the Internet being cited as their co-conspirators.

Your mag highlights a positive story with the Italian police recovering stolen works of art, but how many others carried this story? Given a choice, the media seem to go for the negative but, as *the net* (again) points out, the Internet and its impact is growing at a phenomenal rate and they will soon be forced to alter their view.

There is little that goes on online that isn't otherwise part of daily life – people shop, chat, write to each other, read newspapers, commit crime, play games, watch TV, listen to music, etc. All this will continue to happen with or without the Internet. The fact that it happens via this 'new' medium should be irrelevant. The benefits, or otherwise, give an accurate reflection of society worldwide and in that society businesses fail. It is hardly the fault of the Internet that people who don't fully understand its impact pump millions into the 'next great idea' only to get stung.

The Internet can be, and is, more complex and profound than the gold rush mentality that Jon Casimir mentions. It has remarkable potential to inform, entertain, educate and communicate with people as nothing has before on a worldwide basis. Perhaps that is too much for the tabloids to absorb.

Fortunately we have *the net* to help. As with the Internet, *the net* is developing and growing and the new look reflects this in a very effective way.

Michael Day, via email

Flattery will get you everywhere.

PICTURE: PA

A reader rants

When 'free' doesn't mean free

Being relatively new to all this Net stuff and particularly ISPs, I am confused to see that so many people are still paying for the Internet when many ISPs give it for free, as in no call charges. Indulge my naivety please.

In the days when free meant free, as in no money, one could pretty much rely on the word meaning exactly that. These days things seem to be moving so artificially fast that we've forgotten not to pay and instead opted to pay, be it a monthly amount or per minute. A good example is BT's TV ad telling you that you '...don't have to pay another penny, only another £5 on top of your...' If I've made a mistake in thinking that anything for a fiver is 'free', stop reading and thinking and carry on being drawn in by companies who really can undercut the market if they choose to and offer it all, absolutely free.

May I suggest a mass exodus away from the likes of BT and, perhaps not all at once, a slow yet deliberate move towards the likes of ic24? It would seem that it will be the only way larger ISPs will take any notice.

Darryl delaHoyde, Via email

See page 116 for our test of ISPs that don't use call charges.

Dear Sir

I've been using Freeserve for my email for almost a year now and never had any trouble with spam, and yet within a few weeks of signing up for a Hotmail account I'm receiving regular spam advertising porn sites. Some have email addresses of British universities but on reporting the matter to their Webmasters I've been told they have had a number of similar complaints from Hotmail users regarding spam but that the university address is being forged and the spam originates from the US.

Reporting the matter to ***abuse@hotmail.com*** just results in a stock answer that because it's not coming from a Hotmail account they can't do anything about it. Reporting the matter to the originating ISP, when I can find it, gets no response at all. How are they getting hold of my address and why don't I have the same problem with Freeserve? I'm always careful about who I give my email address to.

Is it just me or are there other people having the same problem? It's particularly embarrassing if I access my Hotmail account at work.

Adrian Burford, via email

Unfortunately, you don't even have to give out your address for spam mailers to get hold of it: with the vast majority of the obvious Hotmail addresses taken, unscrupulous marketeers simply guess at addresses when they send their stuff out. Reporting abuse at ***spamcop.net*** *means you have more people on your side and a greater chance of stopping the flow of mail, but the best answer is to set up a 'Bulk Mail' account within your Hotmail account, which will filter off any bulk mails and prevent you seeing them. If any individual is particularly persistent, use the 'Block Sender' option to stop them.*

Dear Sir

I read with interest the problems experienced by Paul Ratcliffe regarding storing information on set-top boxes or consoles (*March issue*).

Before I even had a PC I got connected up to the Internet – in its very early incarnation – using my Philips CDi console and a company called CDonline. Its system of 'selected' Internet sites puts me in mind of packages offered by latterday cable companies advertising 'the Net on your set' and such, but I even now have archived the 'best' of what CDonline had to offer, even though I too had no hard disk or storage facilities.

The solution I came up with was the use of the humble VCR. I simply connected my console to my TV via a VCR and had a tape I kept especially for Net use. It had its drawbacks, but stored all the images, text, video and sound in an easily editable format to which I can still refer even now the set-up has gone the way of the dinosaur.

Mike Harrison, Warrington

Dear Sir

Your March edition has an interesting article entitled 'The Web: not Worldwide' and this includes the memorable comment on Tonga:

'...Take Tonga , for instance. On paper, it has a higher concentration of Web addresses than any other African nation...'

Obviously the writer has been locked up in their bedroom playing with the Web to not notice that Tonga is in Oceania , in the middle of the Pacific unlike any other African nation.

Brian Robinson
Brentwood, Essex

The writer responsible for such an atrocity has been forced to produce 3000 words on ISP connection speeds.

WINE FOR WORDS!

The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

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The man who terrifies presidents

THE DRUDGE REPORT ***www.drudgereport.com*** The site the politicians swear by – and at…

THEY DON'T JUST INVITE ANY OLD journalist to address the National Press Club in Washington. The list of speakers often includes Pulitzer Prize winners and decorated war reporters; attendance is restricted to the crème de la crème of the US press. To be handed such a platform is to be allowed entry to a select elite of writers.

Which made it all the more remarkable that, in the summer of 1998, 32-year-old gossip columnist Matt Drudge stood before the luminaries of his profession. Drudge had no prizes to his name: he couldn't even boast any qualifications or training; he had never held down a full-time job as a journalist, and worked exclusively online.

Moreover, most of the reporters and editors gathered to hear him speak were there to shoot him down, not to celebrate him. Moderator Doug Harbrecht introduced his speaker with the damning indictment: 'There aren't many in this hallowed room who consider you a journalist.'

Drudge, however, certainly regards himself as a journalist – and a successful one at that. And while he may not have the respect of his peers he does have charisma, a worldwide audience, and global fame – something the rest of the press corps are more than a little envious of; a factor in their disdain of the former shop manager turned news hound.

:DRUDGE REPORT

WHAT IS IT?
A collection of political, media and entertainment stories ranging from conjecture to hard facts. Updated several times a week.

LAUNCHED
1995

TRAFFIC
Around 500 million hits last year, and an average of over 1 million a day ever since.

BASE
Hollywood, California

KEY FEATURES
Links to news sources and individual stories, plus interesting columnists and Drudge's own take on the latest events. No ads or graphics, just text.

The rest of the world knows Drudge for his role in the sex scandal that engulfed the final two years of the Clinton administration. In January 1998, the media converged en masse on his scandal-mongering site for news of the Monica Lewinsky affair: Drudge had heard from a contact that *Newsweek* were refusing to publish what they knew of the President's extra-marital liaisons. He wasn't so shy, and within a matter of hours every major television station and newspaper in the world was beating down his door.

Quite apart from the ramifications for the Democrats, the whole affair was something of a watershed for the Internet. For the first time, many both inside and outside the media were forced to consider online publishing as a real force rather than a frivolous hobby: Drudge had the ears, if not the respect, of every journalist.

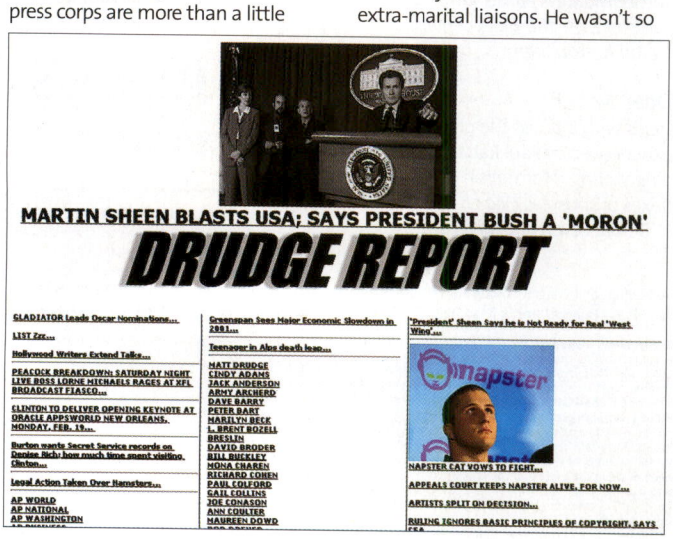
He has spent every spare second since that day defending himself: 'If you directed this type of tough questioning to the White House, there'd be no need for someone like me,' he told The Press Club, before explaining, 'When I hit the Enter button that night I was terrified, I said to myself 'My life won't be the same after this'. And I was right.'

Drudge's route to Net stardom was certainly unconventional. Raised in Washington, he paints a romanticised picture of his life: with a burning desire to become a reporter but convinced he wouldn't make it because his family had no money or connections, he headed for Hollywood and eventually found a job as a manager at the CBS TV merchandise store. His father bought him a PC so he could 'make something' of his life. Soon he combined his ear for gossip with his new-found love of the Web by publishing a 'scandal sheet' of rumours he had overhead in CBS offices and from telly insiders on a newsgroup. His earliest coup was to publish highly confidential show ratings he found in bins.

It gained a huge following, and soon Drudge was a full-time Web master, launching his own site in 1995 and attracting gossip from political and media circles. Lewinsky made him, but there have been other successes – Al Gore was caught out for launching a charity from inside the White House, while other high-profile figures' pasts have been uncovered by the columnist's vast network of sources: from (allegedly) White House insiders to clerks, postmen and office workers who hear something scandalous.

Today, the fedora-sporting Drudge can boast a million hits a day, a column on AOL and a national radio show (the TV equivalent was dropped when the presenter tried to

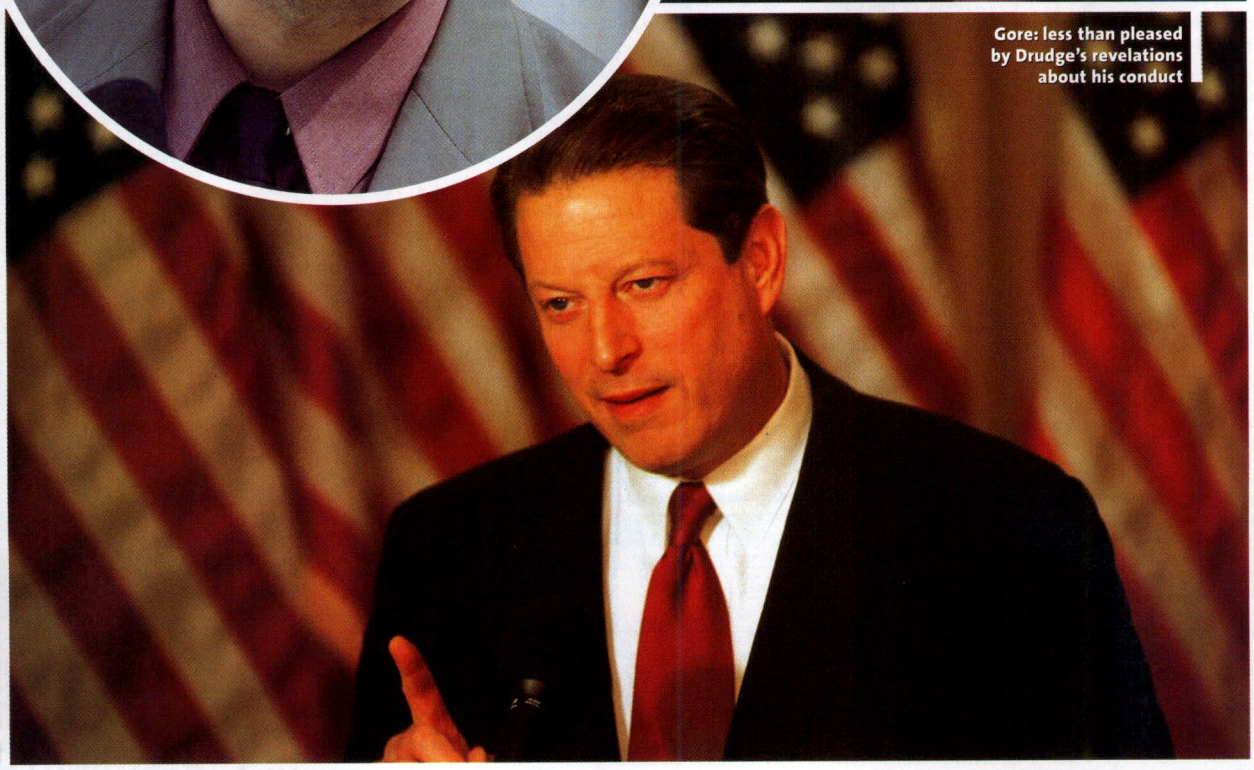
The White House: source of many Drudge tip-offs?



WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: LIAISON; NEWSMAKERS

Lewinsky: rose to prominence thanks to Drudge's exclusive

The Clintons: unlikely to be sending a Christmas card



Gore: less than pleased by Drudge's revelations about his conduct

bring a dead foetus into the studio during an abortion debate). In the December election, 'Drudge Report' was the fourth most searched-for term on Yahoo! He positively revels in the press corps' mistrust of him: they claim he is a poor writer and unreliable, citing a lawsuit from a White House aide he falsely accused of spousal abuse. They hate his celebrity status, his admission that he is only '80 percent accurate', and the fact he operates outside the cosy political arena. He claims 'all truths begin as hearsay... ordinary people know a lot.'

While The Drudge Report is far from the best site in the world – its Web master's writing is kept to a minimum, and most of it is given over to links to news sources, interesting stories and columnists – there's no denying the shot in the arm he has given the Web. From the satirical British music site Popbitch (***www.popbitch.com***) to the Hollywood power wielded by Harry Knowles at ***www.aintitcool.com***, they all look to Drudge. And he, in turn, urges them on: 'With a modem, you can cover the world... Television saved the movies and the Internet is going to save the news business. There'll be 300 million reporters and anyone from anywhere can report for any reason.' Be afraid, Mr Bush...

brightsparks»

:// People doing great things online

Voyage to the bottom of the sea

www.subseaexplorer.com

Bright Sparks tend to fall into two distinct categories: the cunning entrepreneur and the knowledgeable enthusiast. If, like SubSea Explorer, you've got a combination of both, then you're laughing.

Coventry entrepreneur Gary Allsopp, one of the founders of ISP 24/7 Freecall, knows his way around Internet investment; this is a man who started a company with £2,000 and floated it for £13 million. His brother-in-law Aiden Feeney has been deep-sea diving for 20 years – 'I was there the night Piper Alpha blew up, helping Red Adair to recover the accommodation block' – and knew there was no satisfactory site covering what Allsopp describes as a 'focused, narrow market of 17.5 million qualified divers... plus enthusiasts.'

With the idea in place, Net-savvy Allsopp knew the site needed a hook and asked Feeney to find one. 'I scratched my head for a long time,' remembers Feeney, 'and came up with the Titanic.' The most beguiling of maritime wrecks is regularly visited by scientific research vessel the Akademik Keldysh, but at $35,000 per person the price is beyond the reach of the average diver. But Allsopp figured a prize draw on SubSea Explorer for free dives would generate enough interest – and thus subscription revenue – to warrant the expenditure.

I was there the night Piper Alpha blew up, helping Red Adair

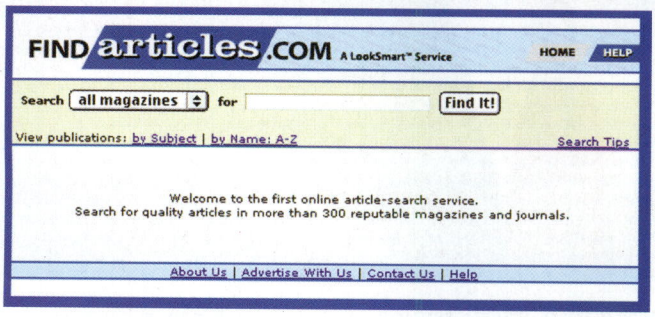
'It had to give me a revenue stream,' explains Allsopp. 'The big boys have gone bust through lack of revenue streams, so we are subscription-based.' Even so, Feeney maintains that 'if no one signed up we'd still be profitable.' He says: 'We've got lots of revenue streams, not the usual dot com 'we're here and everyone's going to come to us'. For instance, we've got the cheapest diving equipment in the UK by buying direct from America.' In fact, they've got so much money that they're giving it away with a charity ball in June in aid of children with leukaemia, at which the Titanic draw will be made and a ticket will be auctioned online.

Not that the Titanic is the extent of SubSea's ambitions. 'We'll be taking tourists down to the Bismarck, and we're following a nuclear-powered icebreaker to the North Pole to dive to a 17th century British warship,' enthuses Feeney.

As for the site's future plans, Allsopp says: 'We're trying to add as much content as possible for stickability, but we have plans to be an ISP for 50,000 people.' Feeney, though, is more idealistic: 'The basic concept is to open up deepwater exploration, which has been limited to the very wealthy, to everyday people.'

:FIND ARTICLES

www.findarticles.com



The Internet: it's like a big library on your computer, except you don't have to be quiet while you use it. One of the main reasons to visit a library is to find out more about your favourite things. So many magazines, featuring the finest writers in the world, have an online presence that it's possible to find articles on just about anything. Especially with a new site called, cunningly, FindArticles.com.

Collating hundreds of thousands of articles from more than 300 magazines and journals from around the world, FindArticles.com has a vast array of information and wastes not a second in getting you to use its front-page search engine. Sling your subject in the box, choose 'all magazines' or narrow your search into fields and within seconds you're given a list of reading materials, all printable and free, to read away to your heart's content. The design is bare, functional and unobtrusive, but no one will be using FindArticles to marvel at Flashy design; we'll all be there to find articles on whatsoever we jolly well please. And what's wrong with that?

Give a dog a bonus with a premium policy

www.animalfriends.org.uk

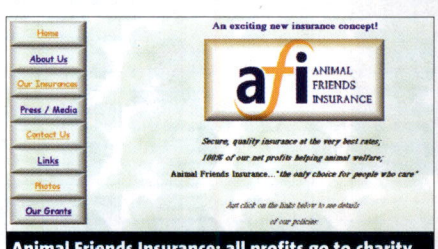
The British, so they say, are a nation of animal lovers. But how many would be happy to put their money where their mouth is? All their money, that is. That's exactly what Chris and Elaine Fairfax did when they closed their successful law

Happy to be in deep water: SubSea Explorer's Aiden Feeney (right) and fellow diver Craig Shaw

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON, ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

business, mortgaged their house and pooled all their savings to set up Animal Friends Insurance, the only not-for-profit insurance company that donates all of its net profits to animal welfare and environmental causes.

Animal Friends works with a number of respected organisations, including The Born Free Foundation, Compassion in World Farming and Viva, donating money to a group every time it promotes Animal Friends and brings it a new customer. 'When we work with an animal welfare group, we give them 50 percent of the gross commission we make on all policies sold to the supporters who nominate the group, not just for that year, but as long as that client remains with Animal Friends,' explains Chris. Once the company has taken its running expenses from the remaining 50 percent, the balance goes into a discretionary fund to which groups can apply for grants.



Animal Friends Insurance: all profits go to charity

Animal Friends sells almost every kind of insurance, the most popular being motor, house and travel, with a boat policy being launched soon. People still seem to prefer to buy policies over the phone than online, but Chris says their Web site plays a vital role as a shop window for the company and its rates. As he sees it, Animal Friends is an obvious choice for animal lovers. 'They can save money for themselves, and as a by-product they're actually helping a damn good cause. That's why it's got to be successful. That's why we sunk everything into it.'

CYCLING SHOPPING ONLINE

Get on your bike – and get yourself online

Lose weight! Get fitter! Save the planet! It's easy – just start pedalling...

THE NEW YEAR WAS *AGES* AGO, and all those resolutions have well and truly fallen by the wayside. Trouble is, you're still a lardy arse and thinking, hey, going to the gym more than once a year might have been the one resolution you could have kept. But all is not lost. Cycling is one of the best forms of exercise you can do and doesn't require a lot of time set aside for it: instead of walking simply cycle to your destination, or even better, get on your bike instead of in your car, and save the environment while you're at it.

But there's no need to rush into this exercise lark. Instead of expending vital physical energy looking for cycling essentials (ie walking round the shops), save your resources (and quite possibly your pennies) by purchasing online at one of the many cycle sites. You could do worse than starting your search at Cycle World (***www.cycleworld.co.uk***). This comprehensive site is quick and easy to use thanks to a clear layout and simple design, with some good offers available – for example, when we visited you could save £1,000 on a Harley Davidson Cruiser, down to £799 from £1,799.

You can also save money at Bikepark's funky site (***www.bikepark.co.uk***). As of writing, it had the Cannondale Jekyll 900 SX on sale for £1,799; an £800 saving on the usual price. It'll even deliver it free. Nicely laid out and easy to navigate, quality not quantity seems to be the ethos; clothes, especially, are rather nice, with Brynje among the featured labels. You can track your order and the site rather helpfully has weather forecasts, presumably to let you know when it will stop raining for five minutes. Alport Cycles (***www.alport.co.uk***) is one for the pros (but why do they think the serious cyclist wouldn't appreciate a nice looking site?), with frames, forks, pedals and seat posts on offer but not, however, via the site; mail order for that, thank you. It does link to other sites, though, all equally top end.

A larger range of cycling-related products can be found at ***www.cyclestore.co.uk***. This massive site pretty much contains all you need to get on yer bike, from eyewear to underwear, all at reasonable prices. And if you can't find what you're looking for, you can email your enquiry to them. Pics of the products seem to be on the sparse side, though, so don't expect loads of helpful illustrations. Cyclestuff (***www.cyclestuff.co.uk***) is another large site, specialising in cyclist's accessories. Don't let the rather messy and confusing opening page put you off, though, as navigating the site and shopping is fairly quick and straightforward. It sells bikes in addition to clothing, and all at reasonable prices.

CYCLING HELMET
£67.95
www.edinburgh-bicycle.com
Browse Edinburgh Bicycle's large and comprehensive online store for some good bargains on clothing, accessories and bikes. It also has an extensive women's department.

But where Cyclestuff's site looks like the work of an enthusiastic amateur who took the product shots in his lounge, Edinburgh Bicycle's site ***www.edinburgh-bicycle.com*** is clean and professional. It's simple to get around, the products are easy to find and well illustrated; useful when there's such a large selection. There's a comprehensive women's section, too, where we found a great bargain in the form of a mountain bike for £99. The site also has a useful news and information section on upcoming events.

Cycle Surgery at ***www.cyclesurgery.com*** is another rather impressive site, with good after-sales service (such as a free first service on your bike). It sells parts, clothing and accessories, but its strength lies in its online bike sales. Cycles are split into categories and subdivided into price ranges. This, plus the straightforward layout and good illustrations, see you whizzing round in search of the ultimate two-wheeler.

If, however, you're a bit of a novice at this biking malarkey, visit Bromley Bike company's excellent site at ***www.bromleybike.com***. In addition to being able to buy a bike and various accessories, you get the different types of cycles thoroughly explained so you end up with one suited to your needs. The clear, accessible layout makes browsing easy, and bikes are broken down into price categories so finding one within your budget shouldn't be a problem. The site takes the guesswork out of getting the right size bike, too: all you need to do is match your inside leg measurement to the listings.

Well, you've got the bike, but what to wear? Most of the sites offer some clothing to buy online, but for advice on specialist clothing and an explanation on fabrics, visit Bicycle Apparel at ***www.bicycleapparel.com***. You can't buy online, but gen up on the terms so you can discuss moisture transfer and heat dissipation with the best of them. Also useful is ***www.sustrans.co.uk***, the home of the National Cycle Network. Let it work out safe and suitable routes for you, so you can get on your bike with a sense of purpose.

;-) Our favourite cycling sites

BICYCLE APPAREL
www.bicycleapparel.com. ★★★★
Discusses the pros and cons of specialist clothing, and has tips on correct fitting.

BIKEPARK
www.bikepark.co.uk ★★★★
Good deals on bikes – plus weather forecasts; always useful.

BROMLEY BIKE
www.bromleybike.com ★★★★★
Excellent site, easy to use with clear descriptions of bikes and their suitability.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE, ADDITIONAL RESEARCH: SHAWNA NOBLE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

SUNGLASSES £72.99

www.bromleybike.com

Bromley Bike had these fab Oakley Eyejacket 2.0s on sale for £72.99 in addition to a wide selection of other biking-related accessories on sale.

KARRIMOR JACKET £129.99

www.cyclesurgery.com

Cycle Surgery stocks a large range of cycling clothes, so take a wander round and stock up on essentials, such as this Karrimor jacket.

SPECIALIZED ENDURO FSR SPORT £1199

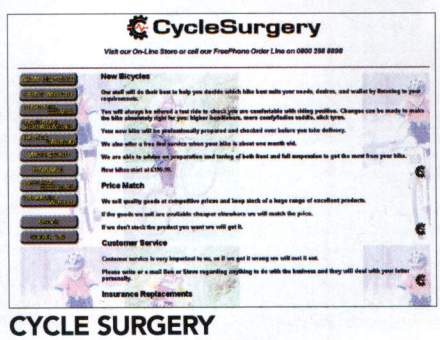
www.bromleybike.com

This rather eye-catching cycle about town can be seen at Bromley Bike, as well as Edinburgh Bicycle – where it cost slightly more.

CYCLE CENTRE

www.cyclestore.co.uk ★★★★★

Massive cycling site, offering pretty much all you'll need, at reasonable prices.



CYCLE SURGERY

www.cyclesurgery.com ★★★★

Sells a variety of cycling related products, and offers an impressive after-sales service.

EDINBURGH BICYCLE

www.edinburgh-bicycle.com ★★★★★

Comprehensive, easy to use site, with news and information on upcoming cycling events.

subscriptionoffer»

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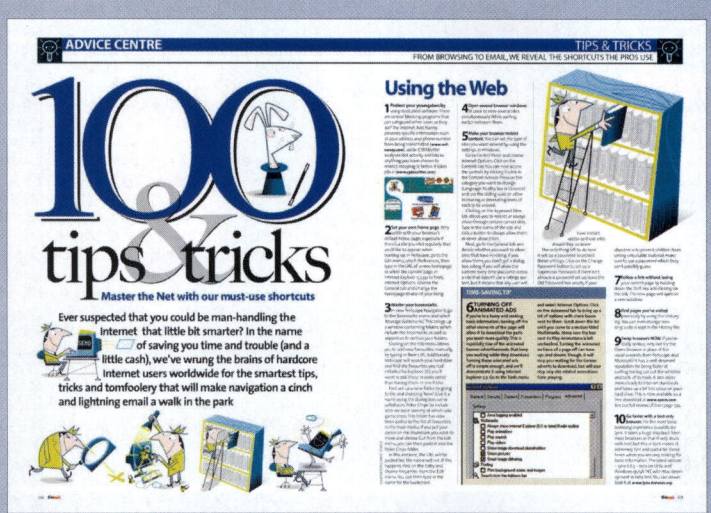
BBC ONLINE – RADIO

LINKS :: ILLEGAL MP3 DOWNLOADS

Sorry – the free ride's over

For just $9.99 a month, you can grab as much music as you like


ADVICE CENTRE

TIPS & TRICKS

FROM BROWSING TO EMAIL, WE REVEAL THE SHORTCUTS THE PROS USE

100 tips & tricks

Master the Net with our must-use shortcuts

Ever suspected that you could be man-handling the Internet that little bit smarter? In the name of saving you time and trouble (and a little cash), we've wrung the brains of hardcore Internet users worldwide for the smartest tips, tricks and tomfoolery that will make navigation a cinch and lightning email a walk in the park

Using the Web

SAVE MONEY >>

both on the news stand cost of the magazine and on your Internet access bills with our time-saving tips

GET THE BEST AND LATEST SITES >>

from shopping to travel, from education to music

LEARN NEW TECHNIQUES >>

to improve your Net skills – either to simply surf faster, build your first site or improve the one you have

KNOW ABOUT THE HOTTEST >>

new Net-friendly hardware and software

SLASH YOUR SHOPPING BILL >>

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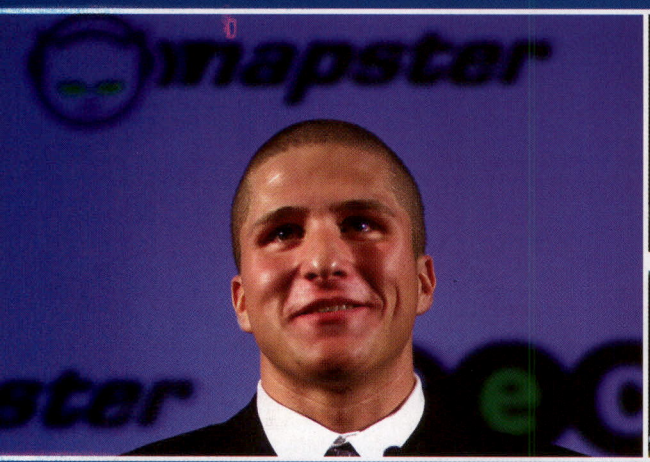
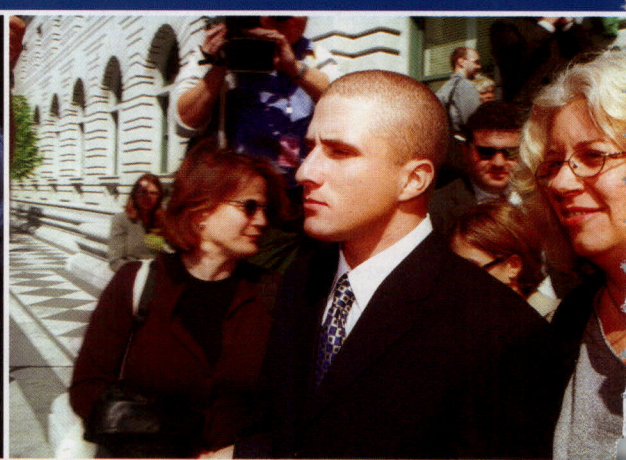
WHO NEEDS NAPS





WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS, LIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, RETNA

Everyone loves to see a dot com 'millionaire' fail – and Shawn Fanning had the potential to be the richest of the lot. As founder and president of Napster, the file-swapping service demonised by the tabloids and adored by advocates of free music, Fanning had traffic figures that dwarfed even the largest e-tailers and a paper fortune Microsoft execs would kill for.

On 13 February, however, the bottom fell out of the Fanning empire. The Ninth Circuit Court Of Appeals in California ruled that the very essence of Napster infringed artists' copyright on a massive scale, leaving the site with an uncertain future. 'It's not good,' admitted the 19-year-old prodigy from Massachusetts.

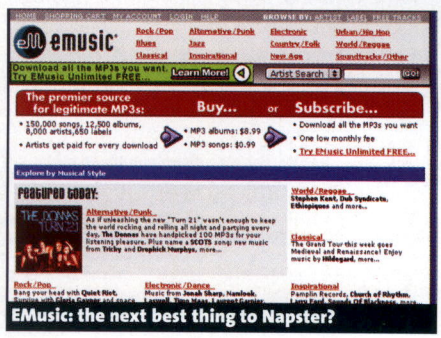
That was something of an understatement; any future free file-swapping on Napster will incur the full wrath of the law, while the record industry is unlikely to do business with the boy genius who cost it a small fortune. Plans to save the site by introducing a subscription-based service are still a long way from fruition.

50 million Napsters users aren't going to simply disappear into thin air

Such sudden and disastrous slumps among the Internet elite are usually greeted with barely disguised glee among the online community. Fanning, after all, had all the traits (youth, poor complexion, more than a hint of arrogance) that tap into the build-'em-up-knock-'em-down mentality of popular culture. Put simply, he needed to be taken down a peg or two. Except only the record companies were celebrating at Fanning's downfall – for the 50 million Napster users across the globe, this was the worst possible news.

IN THE FALLOUT FROM THE NAPSTER case, much of the coverage has bordered on the apocalyptic. It seems a cut-and-dried verdict: transferring music for free across the Web, say the experts, will now be a thing of the past. MP3 as a format will die a gradual death, strangled by a record industry hellbent on forcing every last penny from consumers in the form of overpriced CDs.

Scratch a little deeper, however, and you'll



EMusic: the next best thing to Napster?

The service that let millions of us 'swap' files over the Net is apparently done for. But as you'll discover, the demise of Napster may yet mark a whole new start for music online

TER?

Left to right **Napster founder Shawn Fanning has seen his stock plummet despite the approval of rap legend Chuck D. Opposition from the likes of Metallica and Eminem resulted in an eventual court case**

see that the end of Napster doesn't mean the end of the dream. In fact, it is only the beginning: while the global free-for-all encouraged by Fanning and his cohorts has almost certainly ended, record companies and artists have been handed a significant bloody nose by the whole affair. Just as it took Matt Drudge's whistle-blowing to force online journalism out into the open, so it has taken the Napster case and its impending ramifications to bring digital music into the mainstream – and right in the faces of its detractors.

As the record companies are now painfully aware, 50 million Napster users won't just disappear into thin air – and neither will they be scurrying back to their local Tower Records, tails between their legs, or head to legitimate free download sites to listen to artists they've never even heard of. On the final weekend of Napster's legitimate existence, files were apparently being swapped at a rate of two million a day. »

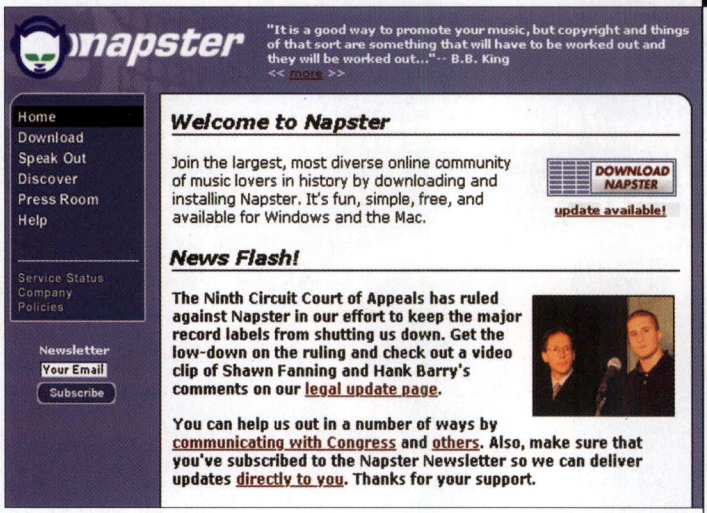
WANNABE ONLINE FILE SWAPPERS

THE NAPSTER CLONES »

Given the overwhelming popularity of Napster, it's no surprise to discover dozens of 'clones' have sprung up to tempt users once the original service has been shut down. How long they can last before legal action ensues – and how effective they will be – remains to be seen, but in the meantime the Net-savvy surfer needn't give up on file-swapping just yet.

The best-known and most likely successor to Napster is Gnutella (***gnutella.wego.com***), which works along similar lines to Napster but has the added advantage of having no central server whatsoever, making it virtually impossible to shut down. However, the service has been blighted by serious teething problems with the software.

OpenNap (***opennap.sourceforge.net***) was heralded as a straightforward Napster clone and it certainly does a remarkably similar job. However, it isn't accessible to ordinary surfers as it only provides link-ups between huge collections of MP3s. AudioGalaxy Satellite (***www.audiogalaxy.com/satellite***) is a highly-refined Napster clone which ranks songs by popularity and keeps an index of every song available; however, it's too easy to shut down, should the need arise. CMJ (***www.cmj.com/mp3***) keeps an eye on the new alternatives as they spring up – you can bet there'll be more to come...



'Nothing will drive them away from digital music, because they've already become accustomed to the convenience of MP3s,' says Steve Curry of emusic.com, whose site is now at the forefront of subscription-based MP3s. 'It'd be like asking someone to give up their computer hard drives and go back to floppy discs – or, more accurately, give up their compact discs in favour of vinyl record collections again. It's matter of evolution.'

In short, Napster's demise is a blow, but far from a fatal one. Its users have become accustomed to getting quality music from artists they know onto their hard drives and, subsequently, onto MP3 players or personal CD players. It's easy, cheap and appeals to the part of us that wants to stick two fingers up to those nasty conglomerates.

We also don't see anything wrong with it. Record companies, the argument goes, are operating a cosy cabal aimed at keeping album prices artificially high: CD manufacture is ridiculously cheap, yet they charge £12 a pop for their product under the guise of 'artist development' and 'marketing'. Taking their music for free is a triumph for the consumer, although as Nicky Wire of the Manic Street Preachers pointed out during a lengthy anti-Napster rant, taking the proceeds of someone else's labour for nothing is hardly in keeping with the faux-Marxist principles of many Napsterites. The courts agreed, and any future Napster activity will almost certainly have to be carried out with the full permission of copyright holders.

Either way, Napster advocates are left with a stark choice: to pay or not to pay. The former is, ultimately, the more likely model to succeed, and EMusic is leading the way. With Fanning still reeling from the beating he suffered at record industry hands, the latter announced Emusic Unlimited and its attempt to woo digital music fans into a convenient compromise between freedom of choice and breaking the law.

For a monthly subscription fee of $10 (£7), they'll allow you full access to download as much music from their archives as you like, including full albums – and they're not just pedalling angst-ridden bedsit balladeers, either. The list of signed-up artists includes Green Day (who have two full albums

UNDERSTANDING THE SCANDAL

NAPSTER AT A GLANCE >>

Make sure you're not left out of those all-important pub rows with our handy guide to (not-so) free music.

What is Napster, then?
Launched in November 1999, Napster is a global community of music fans who allow their hard drives to be viewed by fellow users. Napster visitors can then search such drives for files of interest and download them direct: Napster is merely a conduit.

Why all the fuss, then?
Within days of the site going live, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) was up in arms, declaring that 'virtually all file traffic [on the site] is unauthorised.' It immediately threatened legal action and a lengthy round of courtroom battles began in earnest.

What's their problem?
Most of the files being swapped on Napster are from well-known artists, often uploaded direct from individuals' CD collections. Clearly, such use infringes copyright and (the companies claim) discourages people from buying CDs, which in turn hinders development of new artists.

But home taping has been going on for years.
Yes, but with 50 million users, Napster is huge and while home taping is impossible to track, Napster providers a huge database of 'pirate' fans.

What do Napster say about it?
They claim 84 percent of their visitors use the service to 'sample' music rather than simply copy it, thus supporting the record industry. Plus, they say, because the software can be used for 'legitimate' purposes as well as pirating, there is no legal basis to shut them down.

So why have they been shut down?
They haven't. An RIAA appeal against an initial court judgement has concluded that Napster must block access to all files not officially sanctioned by record companies, ie the majority of them. However, they can appeal, and they have plans in place to introduce a subscription-based service with the co-operation of the Bertelsmann Group (BMG), one of the largest major labels in the world.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR FAVOURITE BAND

BIG NAMES TO DOWNLOAD >>

ALL SAINTS
www.allsaints-international.com
Enter this official site and click on sounds for RealAudio clips of *All Saints* and *Saints & Sinners* tracks.
allsaints.sonicnet.com
This features RealAudio soundclips of *Lady Marmalade*, *Under the Bridge* and *Booty Call*.
allsaints.m3w.com/index.html
Official UK site featuring audio and video download of single *Black Coffee*

BLUR
www.blur-radio.com
Official Web site where rarities, demos and unreleased tracks are played. You'll need to subscribe via email to this and have Windows Media plug in.
www.blurjukebox.esmartweb.com
Entire 10th anniversary box set using ReadAudio plug-in.
blur.sonicnet.com
A selection of RealAudio downloads featuring Blur's greatest hits.

COLDPLAY
www.cdnow.com
Search for Coldplay and every track from *Parachutes* can be heard via RealAudio or Windows Media.
www.idrive.com
Featuring MP3 downloads of *Help Is Around The Corner* and *HighSpeed*.

DAFT PUNK
www.dmoz.org/arts/music/Band_and_Artists/D/Daft_Punk
Featuring MP3 downloads for *Around the World*, *Revolution* and *Fresh*.
www.checkout.com/downloads/music
RealAudio download for *One More Time*.

All Saints: get your Booty Call on the Web

EMINEM
www.eminem2000.com/real/audio/shtml
MP3 downloads for tracks from the *Marshall Mathers* and *Slim Shady* albums.
members.ch.tripodasia.com
RealAudio downloads for *Stan*, *The Way I Am*, *Real Slim Shady* and *My Name Is*.

FATBOY SLIM
www.checkout.com/downloads/music
Search for Fatboy Slim to download *Praise You*, *Love Live* and *Rockafeller Skank*.
www.cdnow.com
Search for Fatboy Slim to find RealAudio and Windows Media downloads for *Right Here* and *Rockafeller Skank*.

GARBAGE
www.rockpalast.de/bands/garbage.html
RealAudio clips for *Push It* and *Only Happy*

WORDS: PAT LONG

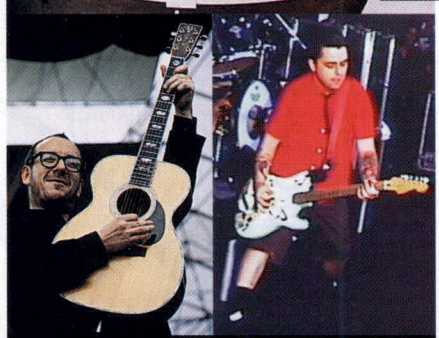
available), Elvis Costello, Bob Marley, Bush, Big Star and The Lemonheads, plus a host of specialist musicians from genres as diverse as jazz and reggae.

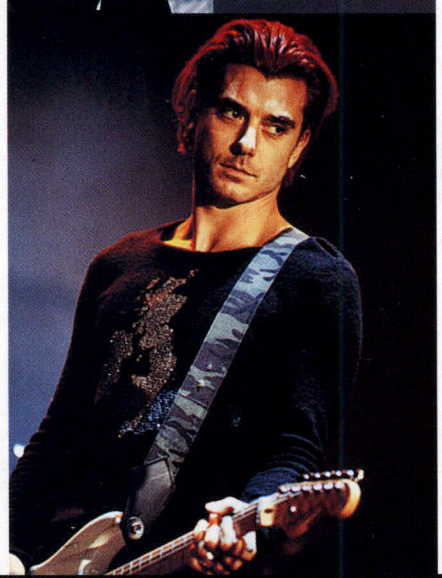
Of course, Oasis and Radiohead have yet to sign up: major labels remain inherently suspicious of handing out their product at a discount, fearing that artists will eventually realise direct distribution, enabling them to take a larger slice of their earnings home by cutting out the middle man. Curry, however, hopes consumer power will leave them with no alternative but to join the party: 'Over time, as more legitimate services are rolled out and can provide better features, it'll become clearer that involving the labels and musicians is a good thing. Fans can get more value and convenience out of a legitimate service...if the major labels had offered their catalogues as low-cost MP3s a year ago, very few of us would heard of Napster.'

'If the major labels had offered low cost MP3s, we wouldn't have heard of Napster'

Warner Music's Mark Foster admits his label is looking at forms of digital distribution, and would consider joining the likes of EMusic, but adds: 'As well as our responsibility to the fans for value and quality, our paramount responsibility is to our clients, the artists, to protect their work and ensure they are properly compensated for it.' The key issue, he says, is ensuring security online.

The major labels, however, often don't play ball – or put Napster et al out of business by building their own download sites – because they simply can't grasp the concept. The pioneers behind Emusic – and those who will follow in their wake, such as takeoutpop.com, scour.com and playhear.com, if not Napster itself – know more about digital distribution than the major label execs. To their annoyance, it's their own employees, the artists, who have forced them into action. Dozens of big names have supported MP3, from Chuck D to Moby, U2 and Radiohead. And when a band as big as The Offspring threatens to put out a record online, it cannot be ignored.





Supporters of digital music: The Offspring (top), Elvis Costello, Green Day and Bush have all posted tracks online

BUT WHAT IF THE MILLIONS OF Napster fans still object to paying a single penny for their music, even enjoying the illicit thrill of being modern day Robin Hoods? Fanning's main problem was that he constantly courted press coverage, ensuring high download rates but also bringing him to the daily attention of the labels. Those in the know had migrated to less-publicised servers long before Napster's problems had begun. They might not have the same depth of choice, but they're still not paying, either.

The record companies are closing in, however. To date, removal of copyrighted material has been a fairly random process; labels need their attention to be drawn to its existence before they can begin legal proceedings. Software companies, however, can sense a lucrative market building: BayTSP (***www.baytsp.com***) are busy developing what they call 'intellectual property protection' programmes, which will scan the entire Web for designated files and contact the ISPs or individuals responsible.

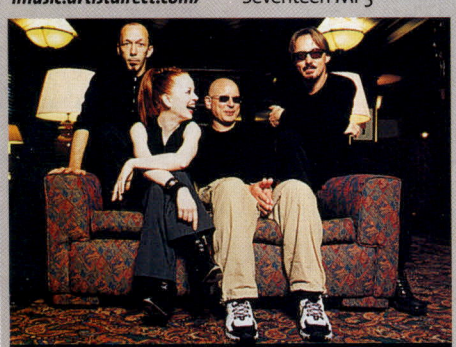
While the future remains an uncertain battle between the powers that be and empowered surfers, one thing is clear: MP3 cannot die, and the record companies know it. And neither will they get away with charging premium prices for products people used to get for free: the effects of the Napster phenomenon will be good news for us all.

When It Rains.
www.cdnow.com
Search for Garbage to find seven tracks from *Version 2:0* for RealAudio and Windows Media.

HOLE
www.checkout.com/downloads
Over 20 downloads from Hole's three official albums
www.cdnow.com
Features six RealAudio tracks from *Live Through This* album.

ICE-T
icet.sonicnet.com
MP3 downloads for *6 In The Morning, Colours* and *May Power.*
www.atomicpop.com/atomicpopmusic/ICE-T.html
Follow the leads and there's an MP3 sound-clip for *7th Deadly Sin.*

JAMIROQUAI
imusic.artistdirect.com/jamir.html
Downloadable tracks from *Space Cowboy, Travelling Without Moving* and *Synkronised.*
mercury.spacesports.com/~mrmoon/main.html
Seventeen MP3 downloads from Jamiroquai albums.



Garbage: That's a name not a description...

KRAFTWERK
www.checkout.com/music
Over 40 Kraftwerk album tracks and remixes.

LIMP BIZKIT
www.limpbizkitland.com
Five tracks from previously available albums
www.limpsite.com/audio.shtml
28 MP3s culled from *3 Dollar Bill Y'all$* and *Significant Other .*

MASSIVE ATTACK
cdnow.com
Seven downloadable tracks from *Blue Lines* via RealAudio and Windows Media.
www.checkout.com/music/downloads
There's a dozen downloads on this retail site, including *Protection, Angel* and *Risingson.*

NIRVANA
www.amazon.com
Search for Nirvana to find downloads from *Nevermind* and *In Utero* albums.
www.cdnow.com
Search for Nirvana and there's RealAudio downloads from *Muddy Banks of Wishbah* and the *Unplugged* albums.

OASIS
www.oasisnet.com
Featuring six RealAudio tracks from each of the band's six official albums to date.
www.amazon.com
Search for Oasis and there are downloads for the *(What's The Story) Morning Glory* and *Definitely Maybe* albums.
www.checkout.com/downloads/music
Search for Oasis and this retail site reveals a broad selection of Oasis downloads.

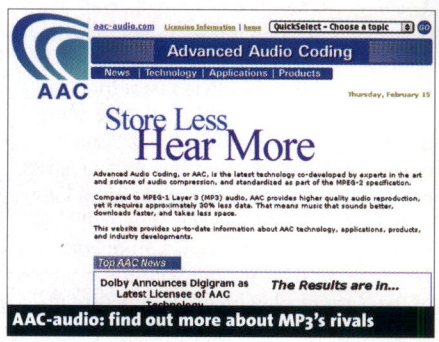
THE PRODIGY
www.cdnow.com
Search for Prodigy to

FORGET MP3 – IT'S AAC »

It's the new format audio experts are raving about, including *What Hi-Fi?* magazine's expert, Andrew Everard

Faster downloads, more tracks on a single storage device, better sound quality – and the record companies like it: AAC (***www.aac-audio.com***) looks set to play a major part in online music distribution. Advanced Audio Coding has been jointly developed by companies in Germany, Japan and the States, and is some 30 percent more efficient than the existing MPEG Layer 3 (aka MP3) encoding. And that means less online time is needed to get a track onto your computer, and your portable player can carry a third more music.

Best of all, AAC comfortably outperforms MP3, and at much lower sampling rates. The claim is that at 96kbps, it sounds better than MP3 at 128kbps, and demonstrations I've heard using huge and very revealing monitoring systems make it clear that even at very low sampling rates (down to 64kbps), AAC encoding remains very close to the CD original. And research carried out by the European Broadcasting Union suggest that the sound stays reasonable right down to 16kbps, potentially allowing eight times as much data to be stored! Get down to those rates with MP3, and things would get very ropey indeed – not that even top-quality MP3 is too clever on audiophile terms.



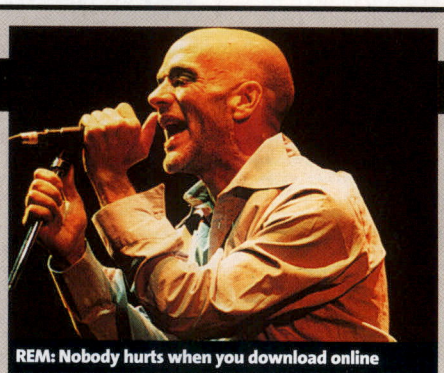
AAC-audio: find out more about MP3's rivals

Of course there's no such thing as a free lunch, and at the heart of the system is secure delivery of music – which means you'll have to pay. In accordance with the Secure Digital Music Initiative, AAC allows content providers to limit distribution and copying of downloaded tracks, which keeps record companies happy. No doubt that's why there's so much AAC-encoded music available at sites like ***www.liquidaudio.com*** and ***www.towerrecords.com***, where the going rate is from $1.25 a track, or about $15 for a complete album and you can also download a suitable Liquid Audio player.

And if you want a portable player, they've just started to appear – see Sanyo USA's shop (***www.store.sanyo.com***) for its $290 SSP-PD7, one of the first AAC-ready machines.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR FAVOURITE BAND

BIG NAMES TO DOWNLOAD »


REM: Nobody hurts when you download online

reach six tracks of RealAudio from *Fat of the Land*.
theprodigy.sonicnet.com
A semi retail site with extracts from Liam Howlett's mix album, *The Dirtchamber Sessions Volume One*.

FINLEY QUAYE
www.finleyquaye.com
With perseverance, this site eventually leads to RealAudio downloads from his two albums.
www.cdnow.com
Featuring seven RealAudio and Windows Media downloads from *Maverick A Strike* album.

REM
www.checkout.com/music
RealAudio downloads of *Daysleeper*, *Man on the Moon* and *Walk Unafraid* are among the 20 or so tracks available here.

SMASHING PUMPKINS
www.virginrecords.com/pumpkins/17html
Features 10 MP3 downloads including the tracks *Faith* and *Trust You Again*.
www.smashingpumpkins.com
Consists of RealAudio downloads from an assortment of Pumpkins tracks.

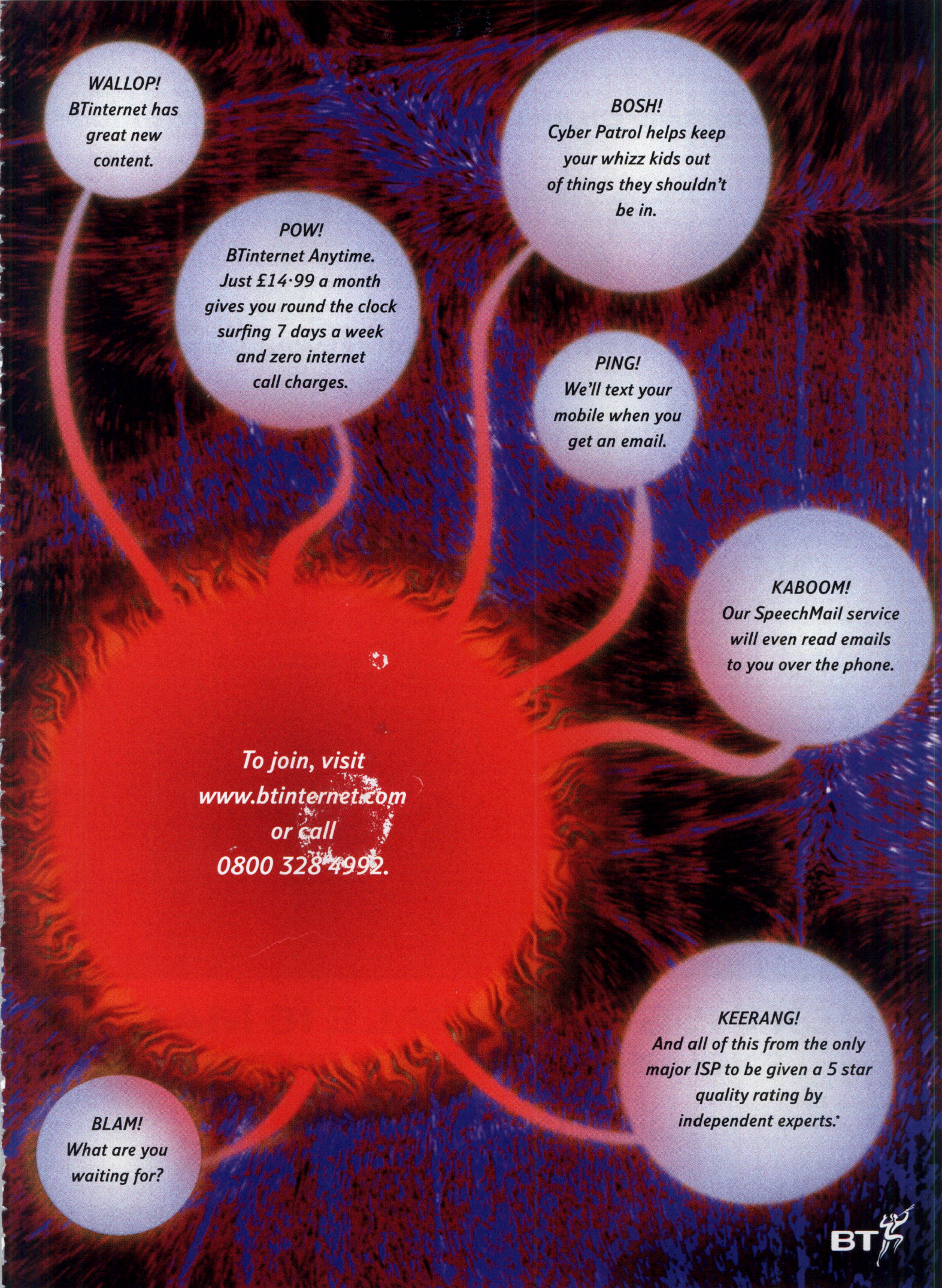
TLC
www.checkout.com/music/downloads
More than 20 downloads available here, including the hits *Unpretty*, *No Scrubs* and *Waterfalls*.

U2
www.amazon.com/exec
Short download excerpts from *All That You Can Leave Behind*, *The Best Of* and *The Joshua Tree*.
www.canehdian.com/non/u2/audio.html
Fourteen official RealAudio downloads from this retail site including *Bad*, *New Year's Day* and *Pride*.

THE VERVE
www.amazon.com
Search for The Verve and find RealAudio downloads from *Urban Hymns* and *A Northern Soul* albums.

WU TANG CLAN
www.mtv.com/sendme.tin?page=/mtv/bands_az/w/wu_tang_clan
Official downloads for *Gravel Pit* and *The Jump Off*.

NEIL YOUNG
www.cdnow.com
Search for Neil Young and this site features RealAudio and Windows Media downloads for tracks from more than 30 of his albums.



From April 2001 BTinternet Anytime requires a BT line or participating provider. *Study was taken by NetBasics November 2000 and is based on top 50 ISPs in the UK. The term 'major ISP' is based on 500,000 unmetered subscribers or more. Terms and conditions apply

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DIAMOND RIO 600 £146

★★★★★

Diamond's assault on the MP3 market continues unabated with this very snazzy-looking player. Visually, the Rio 600's one of the neatest MP3 players on the market and the 64Mb memory, full function remote control and upgradeable design make it more than just a pretty face. We really liked the snap-on covers, but we're not so sure about the own-brand snap-on memory packs.

HYPER HYDE MDM-H2 £140

★★★☆☆

With so many companies now in the MP3 market, manufacturers are coming up with ever more inventive features to bundle in their devices. This palm-sized player includes a neat voice recording feature that gives you four minutes of space per megabyte of memory. Sound quality's well up to scratch and the two SanDisk card slots mean it's got enough room for several albums of music.

PHILIPS RUSH SA126 £310

★★★★☆

It might resemble a chrome version of the old 1980s electronic toy 'Simon', but this 64Mb MP3 player is a very cool mobile music machine. The Rush is an extremely small player; so small it'll happily fit in a jacket pocket. However, advanced features like a bookmark (great for audio books) and an equaliser belie its proportions. If you're looking for a player for the train, this is it.

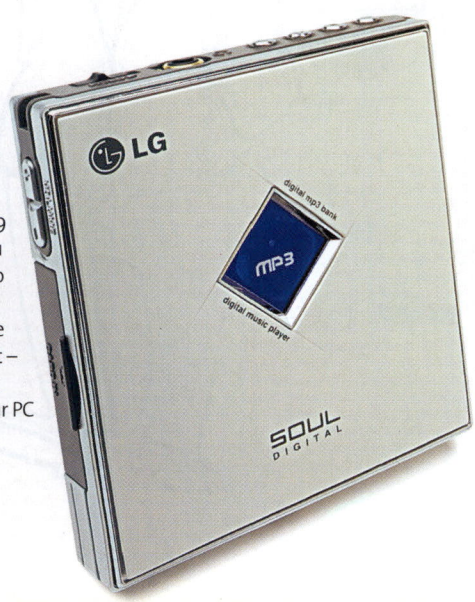
MP3: OUR TOP PORTABLES

Taking your music on the move is simple with the fantastic range of players on the market...

LG MF-PD360 £170

★★★☆☆

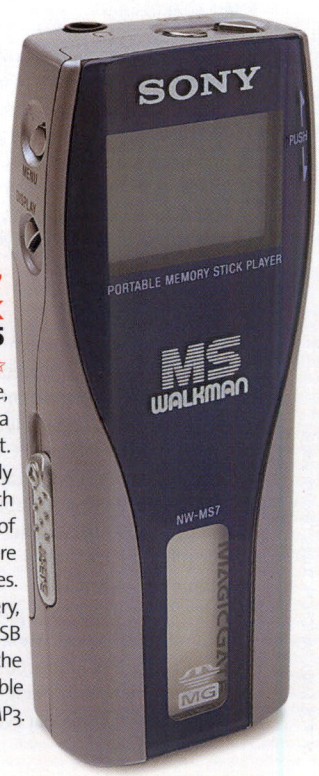
Another minuscule player, the PD360 weighs just 50g and yet has enough space to play back 19 hours of continuous music if you plug a couple of 64Mb cards into the two memory slots. Targeted specifically at women (hence the inclusion of a mirror on the front – no joke), the PD360 has a backlit LCD and connects directly to your PC via USB cable.



SONY NW-MS7 MEMORY STICK WALKMAN £245

★★★☆☆

Okay, so it looks like a Dictaphone, but this pint-sized player is a typically advanced Sony product. The 64Mb memory cards are easily swapped out, providing you with hours of music and the idiot-proof PC to Player transfer software makes this a player for the masses. The MS7 has a rechargeable battery, a three line backlit LCD and a USB interface. Our only gripe is the own-brand ATRAC3 uncopiable music format it uses along with MP3.

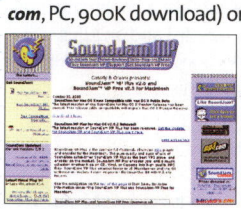


The how, what & where of

DESKTOP-BOUND MP3

> GET AN MP3 SOFTWARE PLAYER
> GET AN MP3 FILE TO DOWNLOAD
> CLICK PLAY

No shortage of choice here. In fact, your only limitation is the platform you're operating on – and even then, you're spoilt. So to save time, head to Winamp (***www.winamp.com***, PC, 900K download) or SoundJam (***www.soundjam.com***, Mac, 3.9MB). Installing is as easy as following on-screen instructions.



Now here's the tricky bit. On the day of writing, there were over 14 million returns to the search 'MP3' on Google. Best, then, to head over to one of the trusted MP3 portals. Try MP3.com (***www.mp3.com***), Vitaminic (***www.vitaminic.com***) or PeopleSound (***www.peoplesound.com***). The average file will be 3-5Mb, so expect to spend 15-30 minutes drumming your fingers on the desk while it trickles through your 56K modem.

And don't forget that most players let you organise your tracks as you wish – so you'll spend many gleeful hours building play lists.

> WHAT & WHERE

You'll need a decent modem (56K minimum) and connection (MP3 suddenly makes a lot more sense through a T1 or ISDN line). You'll also need a modern PC or Mac and – the really important one, this – a pair of respectable desktop speakers to play the whole thing through (we'd recommend Creative Labs Desktop Theatre DTT3500, priced at around £200 – check ***www.creative-labs.co.uk***). Where? You're tied to the room that houses your PC, or else a venue where unfurling your laptop and donning headphones won't appear ever so slightly odd.

MP3 ON THE STREETS

> FIND A PORTABLE MP3 PLAYER
> TRANSFER YOUR MP3 FILES ONTO THE PLAYER
> HIT PLAY

There may be many players, but few offer serious memory for everyday use. So try Creative Labs Digital Audio Player Jukebox (£340 from Amazon). It comes with 6GB of storage for more than 100 hours of music. If you want something smaller, check the Iomega Hip Zip. Priced at around £255 from Iomega Direct Europe (***www.iomegadirect.com***), it comes with two 40Mb Click disks that are eminently portable. No hassle: you simply install the software that comes with your new player and transfer over the files following the on-screen instructions.

> WHAT & WHERE

You'll need a portable MP3 player costing around £200-£350 (and this will most likely need to be bought online – few UK High Street stores stock them). As for where, well, the sky's the limit.

WORDS: MARK PAYTON; PICTURES: DERMOT WALSH

MP3

Baffled by the ins and outs of MP3? Our comprehensive guide takes you through the entire process – from download tracks to listening heaven

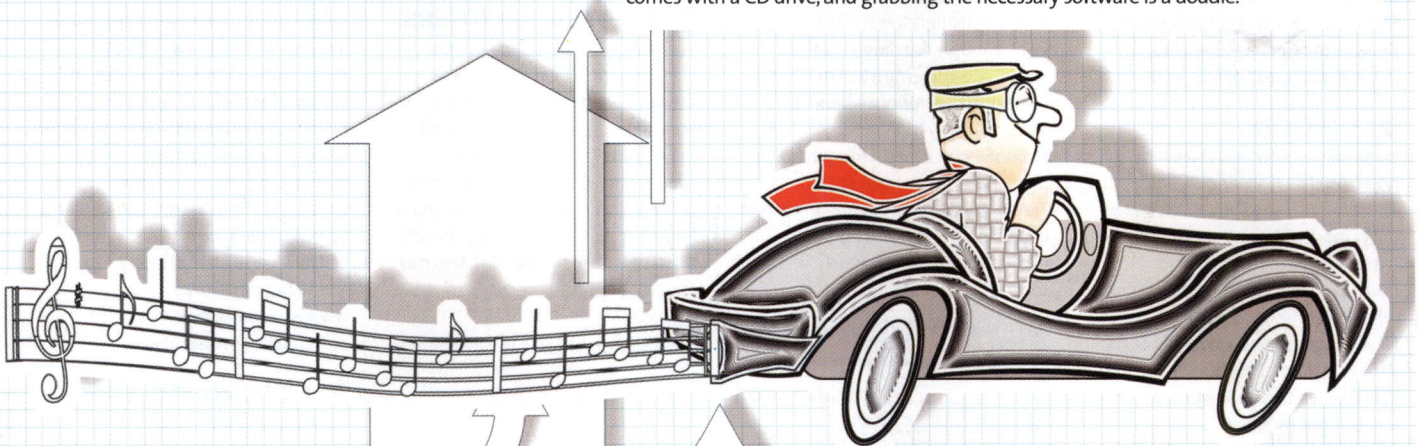
TURNING YOUR CDS INTO MP3 FILES

> LOAD YOUR CD INTO YOUR PC/MAC
> ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE SUITABLE ENCODER SOFTWARE
> TRANSFER THE CD TRACKS INTO MP3

Sick of taking your valuable CD collection around with you? Why not turn your favourite tracks into MP3 files, creating your own desktop jukebox in the process? We'll assume that you have a CD drive, and there's a wide choice when it comes to encoder software: start with RealPlayer's Real Jukebox (PC, 3.8Mb if you have RealPlayer already, 8.7Mb if you don't, ***www.real.com/jukebox***) or Rioport's Audio Manager (Mac, 1.7Mb, ***www.rioport.com***). Using the above software is a process as simple as pressing a button, so you shouldn't have any trouble.

> WHAT & WHERE

Perhaps the simplest process of the lot, this one – virtually every modern PC or Mac comes with a CD drive, and grabbing the necessary software is a doddle.



MP3 THROUGH YOUR HI-FI/IN YOUR CAR

> GET A CD-R/RW DRIVE AND CD BURNING SOFTWARE
> PREPARE YOUR MP3 FILES FOR TRANSFER
> BURN THE INFORMATION ONTO THE DISC
> PUT IT INTO YOUR HI-FI AND HIT PLAY

Many of you will find your PC ready-equipped with a either a CD-R or CD-RW drive (CD-R lets you copy once only, CD-RW lets you copy again and again). As for the software, check Roxio's Easy CD Creator 4 (see 'What & Where').

Without the suitable software, eg Nero or CD4, you may find it necessary to turn your MP3 files into WAV files before burning.

Try and ensure that your CD-RW uses BURN-Proof technology (most drives sold after summer 2000 now support it). Without it, you may find that your CD writing fails because you're performing other tasks on your PC.

Your CD-R or CD-RW should play back fine on your home hi-fi, although some have difficulties getting a CD-RW to play back in car.

Jungle: a great source of MP3 software

> WHAT & WHERE

Aside from the obligatory PC/Mac, modem, Net connection and MP3 software, you'll now need a CD-R/RW to enable the burning of CDs. Many decent £800-plus PCs now come with a drive that will burn as part of the package, but they're also available as bolt-on extras for as little as £125. Oh, and you'll also need the CD burning software (try Nero v5.0, available from ***www.nero.com***, or else Roxio's Easy CD Creator 4 – just under £50 from ***www.jungle.com***) to facilitate the simple transfer from MP3 to disc. As for where, you may find that CD-RW discs do not play on your in-car system. Otherwise, you can play back your CD-R (once 'fixed') in your home hi-fi/ghetto blaster perfectly happily.

The 10 best bands you've never heard

Unsigned bands on the Web must be rubbish, right? If they were any good, they'd have record deals? Wrong. Introducing the online bands you'll be hearing more of...

1 GRAND WESTERN

Apparently, Al 'Pub Landlord' Murray was the former drummer of this London quartet, yet it was their appearance at last year's In The City festival that really garnered word of mouth acclaim. With singer Kristen France's fragrant tones, Grand Western recall the hyper harmonic breeziness of West Coast soft pop acts such as the Mamas & Papas. Yet this isn't defiant retrogression either. As with Saint Etienne, Grand Western anchor '60s sensibilities in today's musical garb.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Phil Spector-era Beach Boys, Teenage Fanclub

stage.vitaminic.co.uk/grand_western

2 SKYGOD

Languid but righteous New York hip hop from the mysterious Skygod. The lead track on this Peoplesound download, *12 Angry Men* is simply extraordinary: low-slung rapping and dirty phat beats colliding somewhere between the throaty rasp of New Kingdom and Kool Keith. Whereas a lot of hip hop has gone R'n'B sweet, this gem glowers with low budget menace.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, RZA

www.peoplesound.com

3 SERAFIN

London quartet Serafin are an excellent head blast of biting lo-fi college rock. Supremely confident and breathtakingly melodic, the demos here echo the ramshackle spirit of the US underground with the distressed punk grunge of Idlewild. Yet Serafin aren't generic guitar-touters: their soaring harmonies and skewed rhythms put them miles ahead of most Camden indie dwellers.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Idlewild, Placebo

www.peoplesound.com

4 SUPERSTRING

Manchester based quartet Superstring display a heavy commitment to free flowing techno with a similar scuzz and squall to Primal Scream, early Death In Vegas and the Lo-Fidelity Allstars. They've also added a spaced-out ambience to their vituperative meltdowns with enough dazzling visuals to illuminate the entire North West. Currently the in-house band at esteemed gay nightclub HomoElectric, Superstring are only a few volts away from greatness. Tracks *Ain't Nobody's Fault* and *Rage* can be downloaded using RealPlayer. Definitely worth a listen for the techno-indie fan.

Superstring: a bit like Primal Scream, though presumably not quite as dangerous

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Primal Scream, Lo-Fidelity Allstars

stage.vitaminic.co.uk/superstring

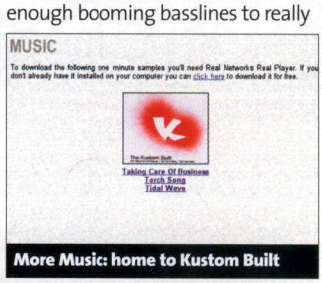
5 THE RIOT BROTHERS

This duo is responsible for nose-bleed techno where the phrase 'bangin!' is apt rather than daft. Sounding like a Euro floor-stormer to be feared and respected, *Riot Squad* is a perfectly controlled union between crisp acid keyboards and a ferocious brand of technoid muscle action. Hard, flash and fast, this has enough booming basslines to really worry teetering PA systems. 'This is an anthem we've created for the squad members who attend our dancefloor riots,' says Gavin Mearns, one half of the pair. 'We see this as very energetic, melodic and emotional techno.'

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Jeff Mills, Chris Liberator

www.getoutthere.bt.com

Vitaminic: wide range of styles



More Music: home to Kustom Built

6 THE KUSTOM BUILT

Loose-limbed Scally funk from Newcastle rather than Manchester and a big favourite of Radio One's Steve Lamacq. Enjoying a fearsome live repute, The Kustom Built's ramshackle Mondays grooves and blissed-out ambient and dub vibes display a greater maturity than their leering vocals sometimes suggest. Still in need of some skystrafing tunes, but their energy and power is all but undeniable.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Happy Mondays, Ian Brown

www.more-music.co.uk/thekustombuilt/music.html

7 BEYOND THE BARS

With hushed folk music the preferred alternative for many, neglected South Wales quartet Beyond The Bars should be making the most of its current bankability. Drawing on the Incredible String Band and Bob Dylan, these acoustic pastoralists forge plaintive folk that's as gritty as it is graceful. Tracks such as *Spring Fair* and *White Hotel* share a similar caressing tranquility to modern day folkies such as Beth Orton. Both tracks are on MP3.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Beth Orton, Sixpence None The Richer

www.beyondthebars.com

Peoplesound: a great source of up-and-coming young British talent

8 CODA

Young south London quartet who've been blazing forth on turbo-charged angst rock in the mould of Muse and Placebo. With confidence and needle-sharp songs already in the bag, Coda have seen their demos routinely playlisted

WORDS: PAT LONG

Superstring: HomeElectric favourites

from XFM to Radio One: 'How many bands go through drug abuse, two failed suicides and a band member appearing on the missing persons list all before their second demo has even been aired?' says vocalist Mark Simon. Indeed. Unfortunately, though, those aren't the sort of credentials music business suits warm towards.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: jj72, Manic Street Preachers

www.coda.uk.com

9 ECLIPTIC

Trance-conquering monster from Edd Williams that certainly deserves to be rescued from the obscure corners of cyberspace. Pile-driving acid sounds into energy-charged keyboard frills, this enormous and brutally-layered soundscape would blow most sugary trance straight out of the water. Edd's not hedging his bets though. 'Clubs will soon get bored of trance and go back to breakbeats or hyperspeed Christian techno. It's a good job I work for a living.' He might have a whole new profession to turn to soon.

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: Drum Club, System 7

www.getoutthere.bt.com

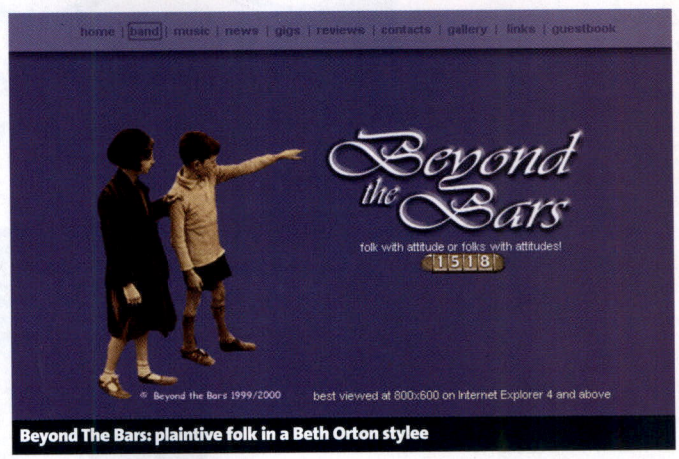
Coda: taking their Muse-Placbeo-type vibe straight to the playlists of Radio One and XFm – and maybe beyond?

10 MONOMANIA

Angular, bass-driven lo-fi indie from Mancunian trio. Recalling the gnarly twists of early Fall and the locked-in tension of Wire, Monomania know how to detune guitar meshings just like arty punks used to. Singer Rick Cummings claims most of his songs are about scary sexual awakenings. 'Like when a mad Goth tried to seduce me in an explicit way,' he says. 'I was only 16 and was shaking all night. I don't thing I've ever forgotten it.' Hear it for yourself .

SOUNDS A BIT LIKE: The Fall, Elastica

www.futuremanagement.co.uk/music.html



Beyond The Bars: plaintive folk in a Beth Orton stylee

UNSIGNED BAND SITES WORTH SEEING

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ROLLING STONE

www.rollingstone.com

The world's most famous music magazine has made MP3s its stock in trade: there are hundreds of artists from across the world here, and it's fully searchable by influence, so you're guaranteed to find something you like.

Rolling Stone: hip

MP3.COM

www.mp3.com

The site that started the trend continues to excel – all bands have their own home page, with details of their background, pictures and plenty of personal info, alongside a good selection of downloadable tracks.

PEOPLESOUND

www.peoplesound.com

The best-known Brit-specific MP3 site can be confusing to use at times (due mainly to the somewhat minimalist design), but there's a huge range of music here – and the guitar-based tracks tend to be of an outstandingly high quality.

VITAMINIC

www.vitaminic.com

Peoplesound's main rival has expanded into a huge range of genres, including classical and latin; it's also now pan-European, so if Nordic death metal's your thing, it's all systems go.

GETOUTTHERE

Getoutthere.bt.com

A high-profile launch from BT, Getoutthere's music section (it also covers film, writing and photography) uses celebrity judges to filter amateur efforts – dance is a particular speciality.

IUMA

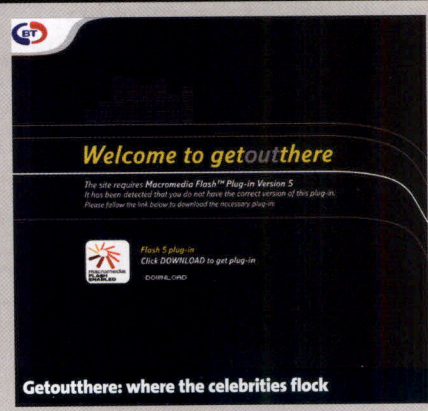
www.iuma.com

One of the first MP3 download sites around, IUMA isn't adding new artists any more due to business difficulties, but remains a massive and extremely accessible repository of unsigned bands.

BESONIC

www.besonic.com

Smaller contender which specialises in DJs and dance music, alongside the more regular rock and pop offerings. Interestingly, it also includes comedy.



Getoutthere: where the celebrities flock

BRAND NEW MUSIC

www.brandnewmusic.com

Does exactly what it says on the tin, although many users may be left tearing their hair out in frustration at the oh-so-clever graphics which obscure many of the functions.

Picture post

Getting your photos online has never been easier; our test of digital imaging kit shows you the best methods

THE INTERNET IS ABOUT MUCH MORE than passive browsing. It offers the chance to be incredibly creative, too. And while many budding writers publish reams of text on their homepages, there's never been more truth in the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words.

So how do you go about getting images on to your PC? Unless you're highly skilled in drawing with a mouse, there are two distinct methods. The first is to take existing pictures and digitise them with a scanner. Scanners are extremely useful for scanning in photos, drawings, cuttings and anything else that's flat (although beware of material under copyright if you're planning to publish it on the Web).

The second way to get an image on your PC is to take a picture with a digital camera. Webcams are the most direct method: they are usually physically attached to a PC and capturing a still picture or video is merely a case of running the software. But there are plenty of other digital cameras out there, from low-cost, point-and-shoot compacts to professional digital SLRs.

Finally, if you fancy yourself as the next Spielberg, or just want to liven up your site with video, it's worth thinking about buying a digital camcorder. These tiny creatures, which use MiniDV tapes, are increasingly used in conjunction with PCs, with editing on your desktop becoming ever simpler.

We checked out some of the best scanners, Webcams, digital cameras and camcorders in order to help you work out the best options– and to help make your homepage and emails as pretty as a picture.

PANASONIC NV-MX5 £1200

★★★★☆

PROS Simple to operate, very high resolution
CONS Not the greatest-looking camera around

The latest miniDV camcorder from Panasonic is a breeze to use, with clearly laid out controls and a clear 3in LCD to view your compositions. Unfortunately, the NV-MX5 only has FireWire out (and not back in), but it does ship with an 8Mb memory card for taking still pictures. These stills were the most impressive of any camcorder, with resolutions of over a million pixels. It might not be the sexiest camcorder in the world, but it's definitely worth consideration.

www.panasonic.co.uk

CANON MV30I £1100 ★★★★☆

PROS Quiet, good for colour and very useful for video editing
CONS A bit on the large side

Canon's MV30i is bigger than some palmcorders, but produces rich, accurate colours and benefits from very quiet operation, so your soundtrack isn't ruined by the noise of whirring tape caught on the built-in microphone. The 12x zoom lens is very good quality, but it's when it comes to video editing that the MV30i excels. Unlike the NV-MX5, it has FireWire input as well as output, which means you can save your films back to tape once they are edited.

www.canon.co.uk

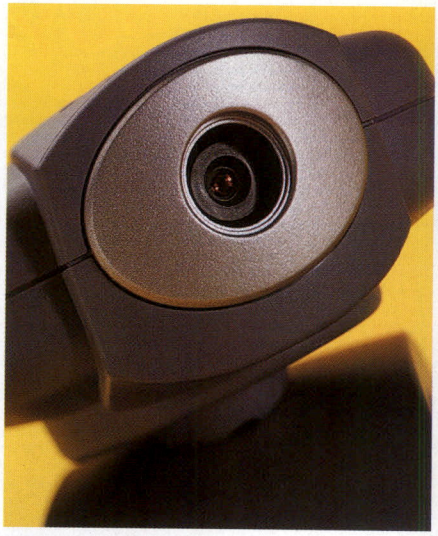
JVC GR-DVX-10 £1300 ★★★★★

PROS Great to look at, plenty of features, perfect for instant editing
CONS Digital zoom is merely a gimmick

Camcorders don't come much more sexy than JVC's top-of-the-range palm-corder. As well as having FireWire input as well as output, it can record stills, video clips and sounds for email (stored on a MultiMedia memory card, which will also play back MP3s). The 200x digital zoom is little more than a gimmick, as once you get past the optical resolution of 10x things become impossibly blurry, but the digital effects are great for editing on the fly.

www.jvc-europe.com

WORDS: TOM DUNMORE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

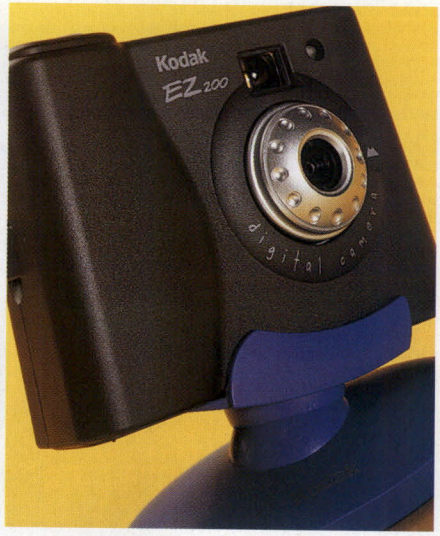


3COM WEBCAM LITE £70
★★★★☆

PROS Excellent picture quality, complete software
CONS Lacks game software

The Webcam Lite is a welcome change from 3Com's previous dull-but-worthy Webcams, but it maintains the company's commitment to great quality. The picture is excellent and the bundle of software allows you to do everything from video conferencing to establishing your own photo album on line. It's just a shame it doesn't come supplied with the fun Reality Fusion game software that's bundled with Logitech's Quickcam Pro.

www.3com.co.uk

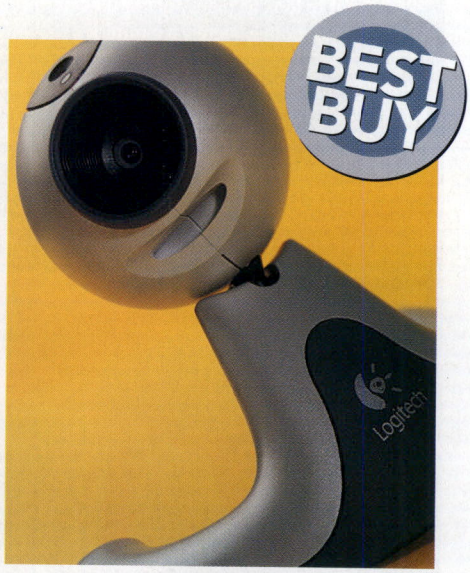


KODAK EZ-200 £90 ★★★☆☆

PROS Versatile, mobile, perfect for beginners
CONS Average image quality, not great to look at

The EZ-200 sits halfway between the traditional Webcams and entry-level digital cameras. Because it is powered by AAA batteries and has its own 4Mb memory, it doesn't have to be connected to your PC to take pictures. This versatility is very appealing, although the image quality is average. Nonetheless, it's perfect for emailing holiday snaps to jealous friends and capturing pictures for sites – and when you plug it into the USB port on your computer, you have a functioning Webcam.

www.kodak.co.uk

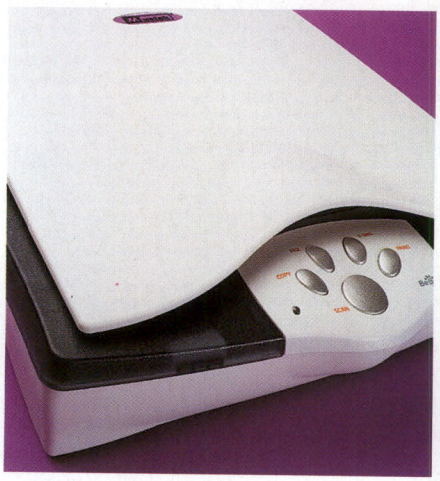


LOGITECH QUICKCAM PRO 3000 £80 ★★★★★

PROS Includes a microphone, easy videomails
CONS Not the simplest cam to operate

A lot of thought has gone into the Quickcam Pro: the inclusion of a microphone is a bonus and the two supplied stands – one for flat surfaces, one to grip the top of monitors – are very useful. Logitech has also significantly improved its software, allowing you to create videomails with one easy click and also set up surveillance and video streaming easily. You can even direct stop-motion videos, if you fancy yourself as the next Aardman.

www.logitech.com



MUSTEK BE@RPAW 2400 £130 ★★★★☆

PROS Easy-to-use software, simple enough for beginners to operate
CONS A bit limited for graphic designers

Flat-bed scanners don't come much simpler than the Mustek 1200, with its cute bear-paw array of five buttons which allow you to easily activate functions such as scanning, faxing, copying and e-mailing. The scanner's maximum resolution of 1200 x 2400 dpi is easily enough for Web use and acceptable for reproducing prints. Also included is TextBridge Pro, a piece of software that recognises printed characters and turns them into text that can be edited, saving you the pain of typing.

www.mustek.com

EPSON PERFECTION 1240U PHOTO £200 ★★★★★

PROS Sharp scanning, great reproduction and fully compatible with Macs
CONS Only a 'light' version of Adobe Photoshop

Slightly more expensive – and sophisticated – than Mustek's offering, Epson's photo scanner is still marvellously easy to use. The maximum optical resolution is 1200 x 2400 dpi, making for razor-sharp scans, and the colour reproduction is noticeably better than the Bearpaw. It also has the added benefit of coming with a transparency adaptor, which makes it possible to scan from slides and film, and it works with Macs as well as Windows machines.

www.epson.co.uk

MICROTEK FILMSCAN 35 £150
★★★★☆

PROS Perfect for getting pictures onto a PC, great value for money
CONS Not very adaptable

Magazines and newspapers often use film scanners instead of flatbeds because the quality tends to be higher. While the Epson Perfection's transparency adaptor is a useful feature, to get the most from film you need a dedicated film scanner with a very high resolution. These have traditionally been expensive, but Microtek's FilmScan 35 is a remarkable bargain and has the added benefit of taking up less desk space and being quicker than a traditional flat-bed.

www.microtek.nl

CANON DIGITAL IXUS £500 ★★★★★

PROS Simple to use, excellent software
CONS So small you might lose it...

Canon's digital IXUS is built very much along the same lines as its APS brother and is just as compact and desirable. Despite being the size of a cigarette packet, the IXUS sports a 2x zoom and captures pictures at a resolution of 2.1m pixels. With its easy-to-use controls and excellent software, this is a great mid-range camera; and as a tiny, chrome and steel-clad object of desire, it is unrivalled.

www.canon.co.uk

FUJI – 4900 ZOOM £800 ★★★★★

PROS Incredibly detailed photos, small and light
CONS Produces huge pictures files

If you're serious about photography, this brilliant digital SLR is a great option. It produces pictures containing an incredible 4.3million pixels; you'd have to have a monitor with a 2400x1800-pixel resolution to view a whole picture at 100 percent size. While the results aren't quite on a par with pro-level cameras such as Nikon's £3000 D1, they are still spectacular and the 4900 zoom is refreshingly light and small too, despite its huge 6x zoom lens. The only real downside is that the picture files are so big you can only fit 10 high-quality images on the supplied 16Mb SmartMedia card.

www.fujifilm.co.uk

KODAK DC3800 £300 ★★★★☆

PROS Compact, sharp, easy to download
CONS Uses power very quickly

In terms of sheer value, this offering from Kodak is hard to beat. It's only a fixed focus affair, with no zoom lens and few manual features, but it's a perfect compact point-and-shoot machine. And the resulting images, containing over 2m pixels, are surprisingly sharp. The DC3800 comes with a separate USB CompactFlash reader, which means you don't have to fumble around the back of your PC every time you want to download photos. However, it would be worth investing in a set of rechargeable batteries as the DC3800 eats through the AAs that power it.

www.kodak.co.uk

The Internet allows everyone freedom of speech without fear of censorship or persecution.

You may view this as a triumph of democracy.

But what if you were the target of the 'free speech'?

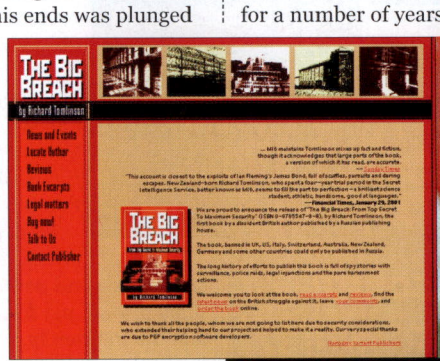
From 18th Century Vienna to 1950s Greenwich Village, cafés have long been hotbeds of sedition and intrigue. When the famous Café de Procope opened its doors in 1689 it soon became a popular haunt for the Parisian avant garde; a place where radical thinkers such as Rousseau and Voltaire could agitate for political change while huddled over their glasses of absinthe. But if they wanted to publish their thoughts they had to labour for years with quill and parchment before convincing a printer in Geneva to help them circumvent France's strict censorship laws. Two hundred years later, cafés are once again a natural home for those who want to upset the prevailing order, but now they serve espresso Seattle-style and have banks of computers that act as instant publishers. But is this progress? Witness Richard Tomlinson, the rogue agent, dipping in the front and out the back of Internet cafés across Europe and the Antipodes, just one step ahead of his former spy-masters at MI6, as he plotted to publish his memoirs.

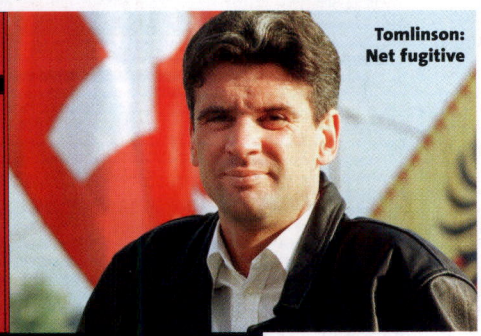
TOMLINSON WAS AN MI6 AGENT, WHO after being fired in May 1995, tried to take the service to an employment tribunal and still insists that is his main goal. His use of the Internet to further his ends was plunged into the limelight in May 1999, when the British government claimed he was responsible for a list of 115 MI6 officers published on a Web site belonging to the right-wing American Lyndon LaRouche; a charge Tomlinson denies, claiming that MI6 framed him. Whether the former agent published the names or not, the list quickly demonstrated the Internet's ability to proliferate files rapidly around the world while governments stand by powerless to intervene.

When he was released from Belmarsh prison in 1998, where he served five months for breaking the Official Secrets Act, one of the conditions of his probation was that he stayed away from the Web. The authorities were right to be concerned: in January, Tomlinson finally published extracts from his book *The Big Breach: From Top Secret to Maximum Security* on a server based in Moscow. This enabled *The Sunday Times* to argue in court that it should be allowed to publish the same extracts because they were already in the public domain. On 21 January this year, the courts agreed: a triumph for free expression of which Voltaire ('I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it') would have been proud – or proof that the Internet is urgently in need of international policing?

Attempts to do just that are currently underway, but whether they'll actually get anywhere is another matter entirely. When the Council of Europe made public the 22nd version of its Draft Convention on Cyber-Crime last October, it raised more questions than it answered. The document's intentions sound fair enough: it would be 'the first even international treaty to address...criminal behaviour directed against computer systems, networks or data and other types of similar misuse'. This latter includes standardising laws on Internet pornography, hacking, fraud, viruses, copyright infringement and other cyber-crimes throughout the European Union.

No sooner had the draft treaty appeared than the Global Internet Liberty Campaign (GILC) condemned it as 'contrary to well established norms for the protection of the individual', with the backing of over 30 signatories, including Liberty, Privacy International and Feminists Against Censorship. It was particularly unhappy about the recommendation that ISPs keep a record of their customers' online activities for a number of years, or even be made accountable for third party content on the Internet.




Tomlinson: Net fugitive

Think about emails you've fired off at the spur of the moment – would you want them read in court?

You can see why. For a start, if ISPs have to keep such records, what happens to firewall and other security tools? Any action taken by you to restrict external access to your online activities could become illegal by implication, thus discouraging the development of new security tools and effectively allowing the government to police scientific innovation.

And in the unlikely event of your being involved in criminal proceedings for whatever reason, what in real terms could a record of your online habits contribute to the cause of justice? Think about some of the sites you've visited and the emails you've fired off on the spur of the moment and ask yourself whether you'd really like the details exposed in a court of law?

On the other hand, it would surely be to the benefit of society as a whole if the criminal justice system were able to use records of online activity to strengthen the case for the prosecution against, say, violent racist groups and paedophile rings. Come the revolution, though, it will make life a darn site easier for our new masters when they begin the clean-up operation: all those nasty little dissidents will be so much easier to identify and track down.

OUR RELISHED FREEDOM TO PUBLISH and not be damned on the Internet poses serious implications for the courts' ability to protect people's rights, like the right to a fair trial. In the UK, contempt laws limit the details that can be published about a forthcoming trial in order to prevent the jury being prejudiced by the media. But how do you stop such sensitive details being published on the Internet?

Take the case of Jamie Bulger's killers, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. On 15 January, the High Court granted an injunction preventing anyone in England and Wales from publishing their new identities, but the judges lamented the fact that there was nothing they could do if someone decided to publish the names on the Internet from outside their jurisdiction, eg from another country.

So how about the Council of Europe's notion of making ISPs accountable for third party content? You can see the thinking behind it – after all, someone's got to be responsible for what's going on out there in Cyberworld – but this simply must not be allowed to happen, not unless we're prepared to see the end of the Internet as we know and love it. Freedom of expression and information would have go straight out the window as ISPs became compelled to impose cumbersome restrictions on their customers and even introduce the routine monitoring of private communications in order to cover their own backs.

But what if it's you who's being maligned on the World Wide Web for all to see? Wouldn't you expect your oppressor's ISP to do something about it? Well, yes, but that's reactive, not proactive – and your success

WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY AND FAY WOLFTREE; PICTURE: PA

will depend on where the ISP is located. Note the case of Dr Laurence Godfrey who, in March last year, won £15,000 damages from Demon (which also had to fork out £200,000 in legal fees) after the ISP ignored his requests to remove a libellous post about him from one of its newsgroups. Snag: the law is only of use if the ISP in question has assets in its jurisdiction.

Last May, a French judge gave Yahoo three months to block French Internet access to Nazi memorabilia sold through its auction site or face a fine of nearly £9,000 a day. As Yahoo has no assets outside the USA, though, there's nothing the French can do to enforce the ruling. So if that secretary who moved to Latvia after you spurned her advances decides to let your wife know about the Web site she's dedicated to your passionate love affair, essentially you're buggered.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Tomlinson's decision to spill the beans about the Secret Intelligence Service, his activities have highlighted how the Internet is increasingly above the law of most countries. Of course, that law might be a draconian provision by a dictatorship to stop freedom of speech, but equally it might be one designed to protect the rights of honest law-abiding citizens from libel, copyright theft or invasions of their privacy. The Internet might well be the greatest advance for the right of free speech in history, but it's also a highly effective tool for abusing that right, and one that so far has made it almost impossible to prosecute transgressors.

Even the human rights pressure group Liberty concedes that there is no clear best way forward. 'We're solid supporters of the freedom of speech, but at the same time, it always needs balancing against things like incitement to racial hatred, defamation of character, libel and so on,' says spokesman Roger Bingham.

'Over-regulation is unlikely to be the answer. You only have to look at the history of the print media; they're more easy to regulate, but it's still an incredibly difficult question.' Asking whether any form of policing at all should be brought to bear on the Net brings a similarly ambivalent reply: 'No, if that means an infringement of the freedom of speech. But at the same time, there are other rights that need protecting,' says Bingham.

According to Malcolm Hutty, General Director of the Campaign Against Censorship of the Internet in Britain, 'trying to control the Internet by regulation is doomed to failure'. He says: 'Once you accept that, then the arguments about where the balance between freedom of speech and other rights should be become much clearer. If regulation won't make the problems go away – and it won't – then you have to ask is it worth sacrificing the principle of freedom of speech just to make it look as if you're doing something.'

There's also concern in many quarters that any attempts to regulate the Internet will inevitably lead to a rapid escalation of state surveillance and consequently a rapid erosion of privacy.

PRIVACY IS CERTAINLY ONE of the issues that raises most dilemmas for those on both sides of the Internet-regulation debate. If the 'anything-goes' Internet as it exists today prevails, we will continue to see ever-expanding databases of personal details until there comes a time when nothing is secret or sacred. And what use is the Data Protection Act if the company abusing it is based on a Caribbean island?

On the other hand, regulation requires constant monitoring which could be even less desirable than what we already have. Echelon and Enfopol – the notorious mass communications surveillance operations carried out by Western governments, which stop and search the ether, arbitrarily intercepting millions of our emails, telephone calls and faxes – have already tried to place a stranglehold on ISPs, demanding they keep logs of every site their clients visit for as a long as six years.

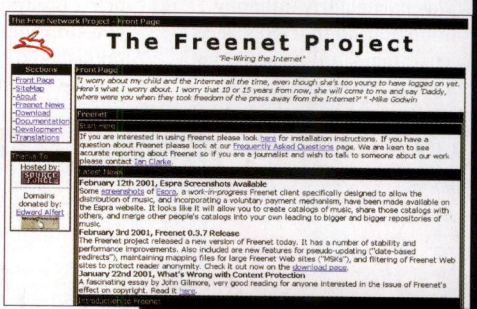
Even if you don't mind government agencies logging your every move online, state-held data has always been notoriously easy for criminals and private investigators to get their hands on. Simon Davies, Director of the human rights organisation Privacy International, says it's a myth to think you needn't worry about privacy if you've got nothing to hide.

'You know, privacy is no joke,' says Davies. 'You need to look at the nature of privacy. It's a line in the sand between an authoritarian regime and a free society. It is a fundamental component of human rights, the right on which all other rights are built. It's difficult to have free speech if everything you say is monitored.' Davies is passionate about this: 'Look, people don't worry about privacy while they're comfortably inside the bell curve, but it's too late to worry if you ever slip outside of it: if you're a wife who wants to escape an abusive husband, for example,' he says.

'If we lose the right to anonymity then we will be forced to conform and sooner rather than later we'll all be living in a Panopticon, where everything we do can be observed and monitored. If you don't value your privacy, well go on; put a loaded gun in the hands of a madman! Voluntarily give away your rights! Well, anyone who does that is a fool.'

Perhaps the banishing of offensive content, such as Nazi propaganda and pornography, would be a small price to pay for the freedom of speech that the Internet is so suited to propagating. But at the same time, it can be argued that the right to freedom of speech carries with it responsibilities and if Net users ignore those responsibilities by publishing offensive material, libels and so forth, then they abrogate their rights and we must find a means of enforcing the law through international agreements.

If that means disgruntled spies can no longer publish their memoirs, some might say that's a small price to pay for the right to privacy, the right to a fair trial and protection from libel. But the chances of any regulation being effective are very slim; the pragmatic solution could well be to learn to live with both Internet uses and abuses.



THE FREENET PROJECT

Until now, it hasn't been too difficult to trace the source of material on the Internet. If you find a site containing libellous information about you, try running the Tracert programme that comes with Windows, and this will give you the IP number of the Web site. Type that into the Whois search engine at the Ripe Web site (***www.ripe.net/cgi-bin/whois***) and it'll tell you which ISP hosts the site. Get their number, call and complain, and there's a good chance they'll delete the offending page. But now there's the Freenet Project (***www.freenet.com***), an alternative to the World Wide Web coming to a PC near you soon. Freenet will allow anyone with a modem and the right software to post files on the Internet with complete anonymity. The location of the file itself will be impossible to locate, thus impossible to remove. And you thought the Web was a fount of liberal dilemmas. Freenet is Napster and some: absolute freedom of speech, alongside undeletable, untraceable libels, copyright violations, contempts of court and whole sewers-full of offensive material. The implications of such a service are huge – and the authorities are one step behind it.

Freenet is absolute freedom of speech, alongside sewers-full of offensive material

LINKS

Council of Europe Draft Convention on Cyber-Crime
Conventions.coe.int/treaty/projets/projets.htm
Extracts from The Big Breach *in* The Sunday Times
www.Sundaytimes/co.uk/news/pages/sti/2001/01/14/stifocnws03001.html

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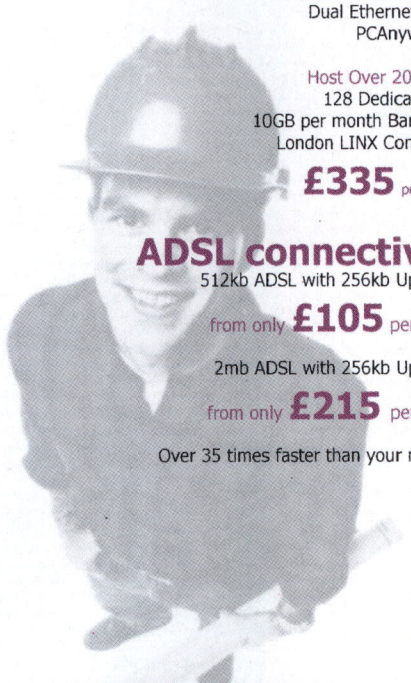

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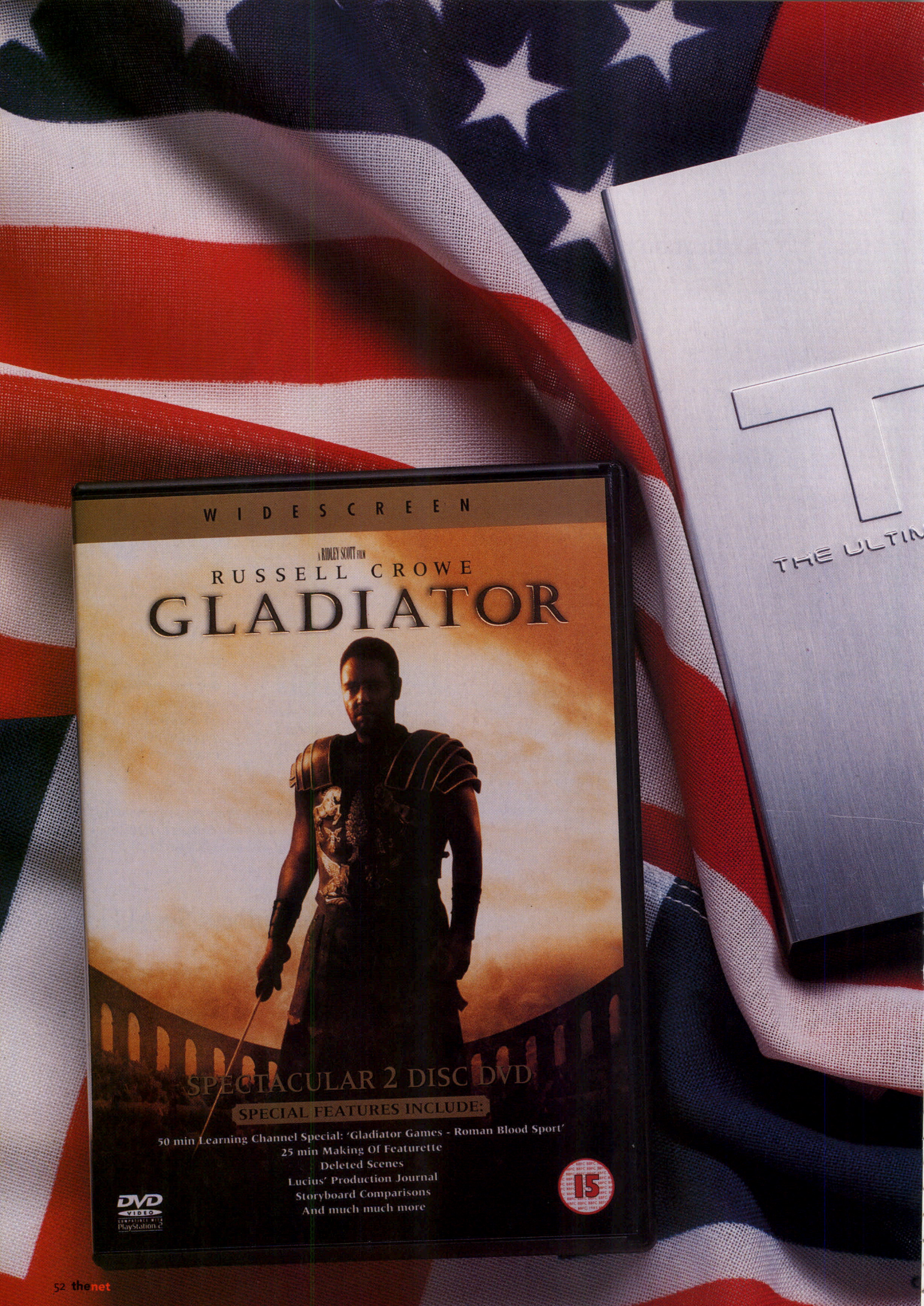
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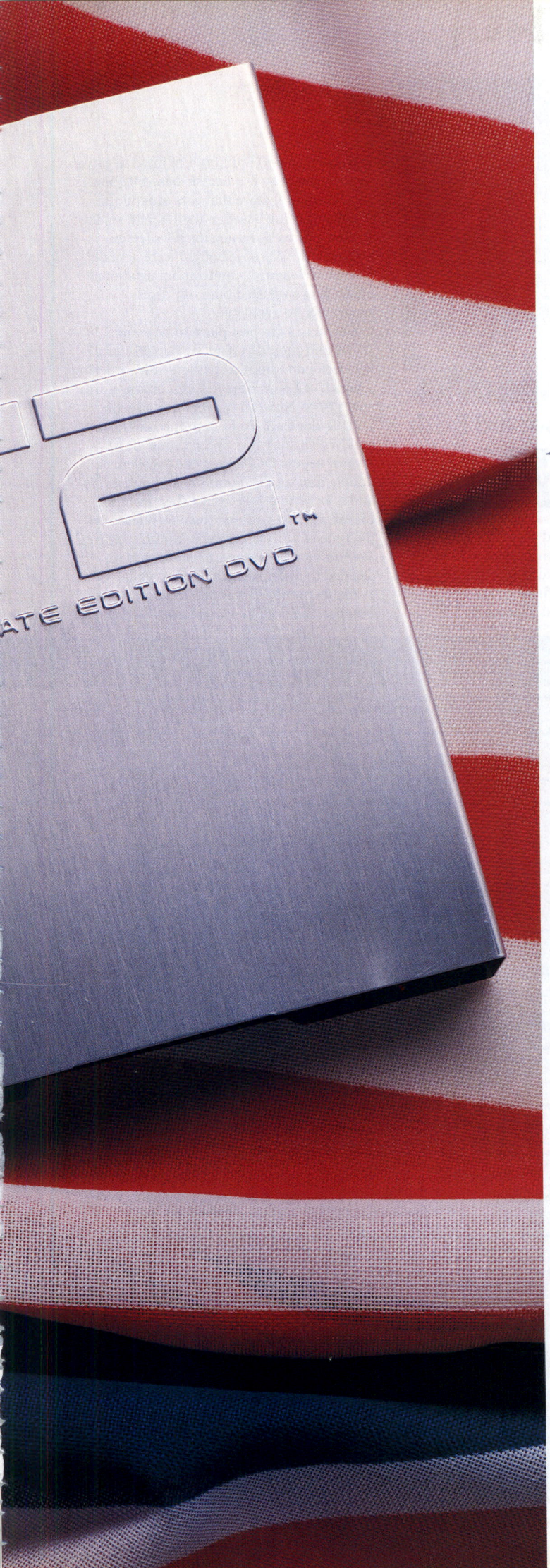
PlayStation 2
THE ULTIM



Got it made in AMERICA

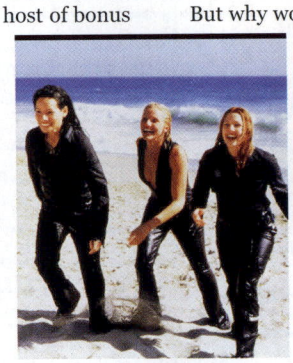
Shopping on sites the other side of the Atlantic gets you new DVDs faster – but how do the sites, and service, match up?

DVD-VIDEO IS THE FASTEST selling new format ever, and that's official. People have got on board the DVD train much faster than they ever did with the now ubiquitous Compact Disc, and there's a good reason why. DVD is simply much better then any video format that's gone before it; it has a clearer picture, superior sound and often comes with a host of bonus features to add extra value.

Unsurprisingly then, DVD stores have become a major Net fixture, with big online players such as Amazon doing battle with bricks-and-mortar giants like HMV and smaller dedicated movie sites like DVD Popcorn. As with anything bought online, the cost and convenience are important. Not everybody is in easy reach of a Virgin Megastore with a comprehensive selection of titles, and online prices are generally lower than in the high street, even when postage is taken into the equation. For example, the *Gladiator* double disc sells for around £25 in shops, while online that price drops to as little as £19.95, giving you a £5 cushion for postage. Another plus is that sites such as Blackstar offer up to 20 percent discount on pre-orders of new releases, and then post them to you so they arrive on the day of release.

Buying DVDs is more complicated than shopping for CDs. DVDs are region coded; what this means to us in the UK is that Region 1 discs (USA and Canada) can't be played on machines made for the Region 2 market (Europe). This is Hollywood's way of protecting its massive movie investment.

But why would you want a disc from another region? The reason is threefold. Firstly, films come out in the States long before they make it here and thus the DVDs come out sooner; *High Fidelity* was available to buy on DVD in America at the time of its UK cinema release. *Charlie's Angels* was available on DVD two months before it hit UK stores. Occasionally it's not even the American DVD release that jumps ahead; the Region 3 disc (Hong Kong and south-west Asia) of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is doing great business at MovieTyme (**www.movietyme.com**) right now.



***Charlie's Angels* was available two months before it hit the UK**

Secondly, the number of movies available in America far exceeds the range currently on sale here. Classic movies like *Touch Of Evil* have been sold in the States for some time, but there's no sign of a UK release.

Thirdly, US discs often have more features or come in special editions that we're deprived of,

WORDS: SHAUN MARIN; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT, KOBAL, IMAGE NET

with the collector's edition of *Boogie Nights* being a case in point. But fear not, film fans, because the ease of access to multi-region DVD players and the globalisation of markets thanks to the Internet means we no longer have to miss out. Buying from American sites is not really that much more tricky than buying from the UK.

There are drawbacks to buying American discs, though. First off, postage and packing costs dramatically cut down on any savings you might make because of lower American prices, as will any VAT incurred when the parcel arrives in this country. Packages that contain goods worth more than £18 will often have VAT and duty totalling around 20 percent levied on them, so it's a fine line between buying multiple discs to save on postage and then having to pay the government for the privilege, or getting them shipped individually and paying more for postage. Another major drawback is delivery times: these discs are coming from much further away and unless you want to fork out extra for a courier service, you'll have to be prepared to wait around a week to get them. We ordered *Gladiator* from 12 sites across the world and with one exception all the Region 2 discs arrived first.

They even posted both our discs separately to avoid paying tax

However, sites such as Play 247 (**www.play247.com**) limit both of these negative factors. Play 247 is a British-based Region 1 (and Region 2) store that gets around the legality of being based in the UK and selling Region 1 discs by basing itself in Jersey, although the discs we bought were actually posted in Belgium – quite an international affair. It even posted both our discs separately, to avoid tax.

So where's the best place to buy your DVDs and should you go for Region 1 or 2? We decided to put this to the test by ordering a bunch of DVDs from a dozen online stores, split 50/50 between the regions; a sort of DVD Ryder Cup. From both the American and British stores we ordered one of the biggest selling DVDs ever, the excellent double disc set of *Gladiator*, in the Region 1 and 2 formats respectively. Then from the British sites we ordered the new release (at the time of writing) of Kevin Smith's satirical *Dogma*. For the second Region 1 disc we decided to order something that while available in the US will not be sold here until October, the double disc collector's edition of

UK

NAME	GLADIATOR	DOGMA	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
AMAZON	£19.99	£15.99	£2.08	£38.06	1 day	2 days

BEST FOR CHOICE

www.amazon.co.uk The best-known retail site on either side of the Atlantic
Amazon's range of Region 2 discs is fantastic. Confirmation of the receipt of the order was quick to arrive and the company also offers to gift wrap your purchase if it's a present. However, postage and packing added to the price significantly, especially as this was the only Region 2 site we tested that charged for this service.

BLACKSTAR	£22.49	£17.99	Free	£40.48	1 day	2(D) 7 (G)

www.blackstar.co.uk UK site dedicated to video and DVD
Blackstar once stocked CDs, too, but by focusing on videos and DVDs, the Northern Ireland-based site has made itself the first choice for many people when buying movies. Our hunch was that this site would come out best, but higher prices and *Gladiator* getting lost in the post (no fault of the site and quickly re-sent) leaves it lagging.

DVD POPCORN	£19.99	£15.99	Free	£35.98	1 day	2 days

www.DVDpopcorn.com Great site with free delivery and gift
This site was just pipped at the price post by FilmTwo, but the inclusion of a free packet of Microwave popcorn with every order more than makes up for this 8p difference. The service ran smoothly and ordering was simple.

DVD STREET	£20.99	£16.99	Free	£37.98	1 day	1 day

www.dvdstreet.co.uk DVD arm of the Streets Online retail group
DVD Street offers a wide range of titles and includes genre sections to trawl through, while the search engine takes you where you want quickly. An account was quick to set up and once ordered from, the EZYbuy option makes for speedy future transactions.

FILMS2	£19.95	£15.95	Free	£35.90	1 day	1 day

www.films2.com Surprisingly fast and efficient low-key player
Not only was Films2 the cheapest for both titles, but it also offered free delivery and within an hour of ordering we'd received an email saying our goods had been dispatched. All very impressive and with a good range of titles in stock, too.

DVD WORLD	£21.98	£16.99	Free	£38.97	1 day	1 day

www.dvdworld.co.uk Great-looking Region 2 site
This site manages to combine the cinema passion of the IMDB with the retail know-how of Amazon, but with free delivery into the bargain. A wide selection of movies, comprehensive reviews and great interactive features including trailers and screen shots of major movies. Also sells multi-region DVD players.

DELIVERY (p) = promised; **DELIVERY** (a) = actual; **(D)** = Dogma; **(G)** = Gladiator

Charlie's Angels: available on a site near you

Terminator 2; a big seller in America and a disc that people in the UK with multi-region machines are buying in droves.

In order to be fair, we ordered all the discs within a hectic one-hour period, just to give all the sites an equal chance of getting the goods to us. The results prove that, as with many other e-commerce markets, you're often better off straying from the beaten path and taking a risk with smaller stores if you want to be pleasantly surprised.

IT'S NOT WHERE YOU'RE FROM...

...IT'S WHERE YOU'RE AT. WE EXPLAIN THOSE DVD REGIONS

Most DVDs are regionally coded so they won't play in DVD players sold in other regions. Encoding discs means Hollywood can continue to stagger movie releases around the world by preventing you from buying the DVD before the film arrives at your local multiplex. The region code is actually a very small piece of information on the disc, which the DVD player checks.

THE SIX REGIONS:

1. **US, Canada, US Territories**
2. **Europe, Japan, South Africa, and Middle East**
3. **South-east Asia and East Asia**
4. **Australia, New Zealand, Central America, Mexico, South America, Caribbean**
5. **Eastern Europe, Indian subcontinent, Africa, North Korea and Mongolia**
6. **China**

Web Electricals: expert chipsters

So when you buy a DVD player in the UK, it will be a Region 2 machine. However, many players are 'hackable'. This generally takes the form of pressing a few buttons on the handset in a set order, which changes the player's region coding. A good source of these codes is the Dr DVD section of DVD Debate (***www.dvddebate.com***), where you can also check to see if your own machine is hackable If it's not, you need to get it 'chipped'; you can buy pre-chipped players from Sony et al from online stores such as ***www.webelectricals.co.uk;*** or if you already own a player from a big name brand, sites such as ***www.techtronics.com*** can modify it for you.

USA

NAME	GLADIATOR	TERMINATOR 2	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
CDNOW	£16.63	£22.17	£4.99	£43.79	1-4 days	9 days

www.cdnow.com Massive US music giant does the video thing, too

Don't let the name fool you; this massive US site offers a wide range of DVDs into the bargain. The choice is first rate and the site is obviously set up for people in the UK to purchase Region 1 discs, as once our address was entered it moved to a European server and dispatched the discs from the Continent. You can even choose to view prices in sterling or dollars.

DVD EMPIRE	£15.48	£20.64	£6.82	£42.93	About a week	9 days

www.dvdempire.com A great looking site of Amazon stature

DVD Empire stocks a breathtaking selection of discs and has reviews of almost all of them. Ordering is simple, although you will need to fax your credit card statement or another proof of address before they'll send the goods. But unlike Ken Crane's (see below) they immediately notified us of receipt.

DV-DEPOT	£16.50	£20.62	£2.72	£39.82	3 days	4 days

www.dv-depot.com Canadian site with good shipping rates

Signing up to this Canadian site was a bit tricky, as it wouldn't accept our attempts to log in for ages. For no apparent reason it kept on telling us our name was insecure, the cheek of it. But once logged on the ordering process was simple and the discs were reasonably priced.

KEN CRANE'S	£14.45	£19.27	£5.51	£39.22	Not Specified	12 days

www.kencrane.com Past master, but with a lot to learn on customer service

The range of titles here is very impressive, but you'll need to fax through a copy of your credit card and statement before your order will be accepted. This is fine, but when we emailed Ken Crane's to confirm our fax had been received, we received no reply and there's no way to check your account online.

MOVIETYME	£12.99	£12.99	£2.95	£28.93	4-10 days	11 days

BEST FOR VALUE

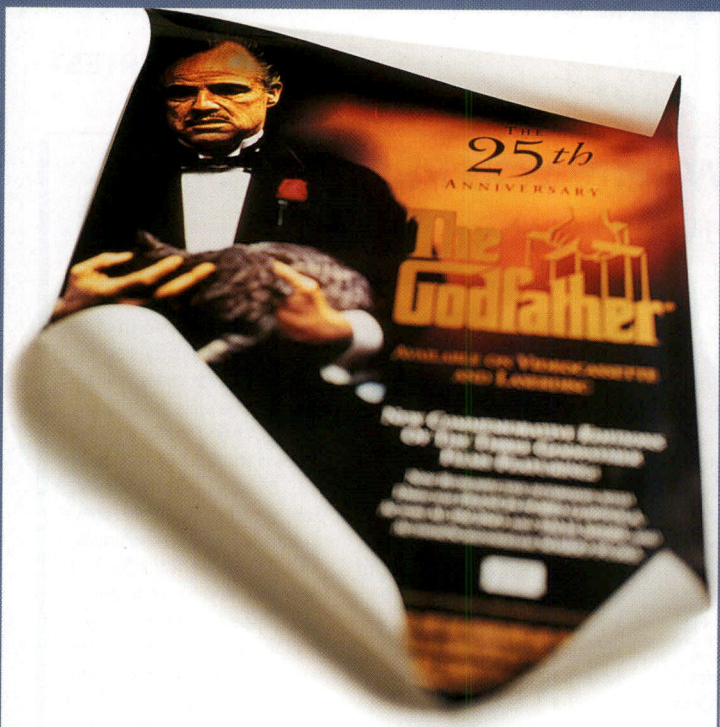
www.movietyme.com Forget the silly name, check out the range

This site is ideal for UK users. It offers prices in pounds sterling as well as dollars and has reasonable postage rates to the UK. On some 'specialist' titles it even offers free delivery to Europe. Information is sparse on all but the major releases, but the range of titles available is impressive.

PLAY247	£17.99	£17.99	Free	£35.98	3-5 days	4 days

www.play247.com Sells both Region 1 and Region 2 DVD discs

Jersey-based Play247 manages to get around the Region coding issue and sells Region 1 discs in the UK. The selection of discs available is nowhere near as impressive as some of the US stores, but prices are very reasonable, postage free to the UK and the goods arrived well before any of the other Region 1 discs.



POSTER £12

Movie posters are highly collectible, so buy one from ***www.moviemarket.co.uk*** and get into the Oscar spirit at the same time... Delivery in 2 days; £1.75 p&p.

BOOTS £59.95

March is veggie month, so take the first step (sorry) and buy footwear suitable for veggies from ***www.vegetarian-shoes.co.uk***. £4.50 for next day delivery.

Retailtherapy»

:// Yet more chocolate (hey, it's good stuff) plus a PDA and veggie boots

FRISBEE £12.95

A special frisbee, this: programme it with a message and see your words flying through the air on the digital display. ***www.paramountzone.com***.

ECTACO EE586HT £259.95

A PDA with a dictionary...or a multi-lingual communication system if you're being posh. Fear going abroad no longer. Take a look at ***www.ectaco.co.uk***.

TOP BUY

PALM M100 £116.99

Keep track of your life with the help of this little cutie. Jot down notes, keep a tab on appointments – even download info from the Net. And you don't need a second mortgage... Visit ***www.widget.co.uk***.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

PSION WAVEFINDER £299.99

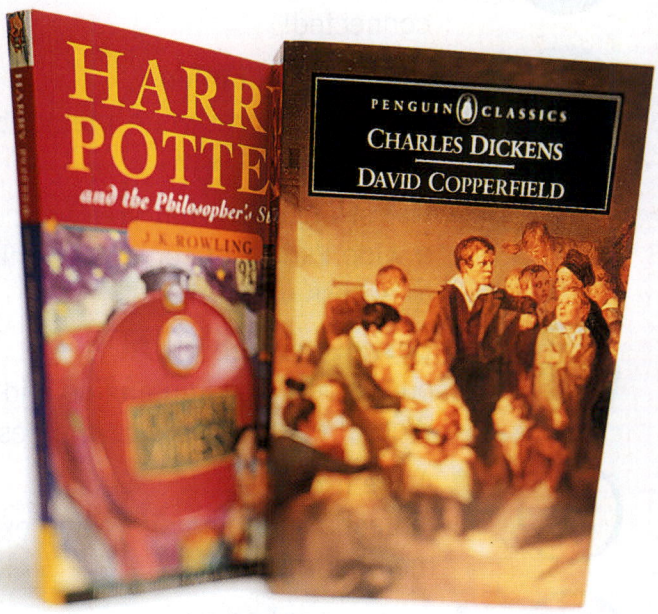
This interactive digital radio guarantees crystal-clear audio – plus it offers one-click MP3 recording. Go to ***www.pcworld.co.uk***; p&p is £3.25, delivery in 2 days.

EASTER EGG £8

OK, OK – yes, we know this is *more* chocolate, but it is Easter and only to be expected... Delivery within 5 days with £3.95 p&p from ***www.thorntons.co.uk***.

TIES FROM £14.99

25-31 March is British Tie Week, so why not purchase some nifty neckwear from the large selection at ***www.thetiecompany.co.uk***. Delivery varies.



BOOKS FROM £3.99

Baby, it's cold outside...so cosy up with a good read. Dickens is eternal, and Harry Potter ain't just for kids. Purchase from ***www.waterstones.co.uk***.

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR PAINLESS ONLINE PURCHASING

TOP TIPS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING»

CHECK THAT THE SITE IS SECURE

A small padlock will appear in the bottom left of your browser to show that you can safely send credit card details through the site. Your Web browser will also tell you whether a site is secure or not when you enter it.

SHOP WITH BRAND-NAME COMPANIES

As with shopping in the real world, you're better off with a company you've actually heard of – and these days, most big name brands own their Web addresses (so you can be sure that ***www.marksandspencer.com*** is, in fact, M&S).

PRINT THE CONTRACT

This is the only permanent record of your purchase, so make sure you keep it, along with your order number, billing address and other details. And here's a fact to put your mind at rest: if it's a UK site, you have the same consumer rights as you do in the high street.

NEVER SEND ANYTHING BY EMAIL

Don't send card details by email – it can be intercepted.

CHECK DELIVERY TIMES AND CHARGES

Companies should tell you the delivery charge, if there is one, on their site. If you're in the Highlands and Islands or Ireland, you may find free delivery doesn't apply.

IF IT GOES WRONG, DON'T WORRY

Contrary to scare stories, online shopping is safer and very often cheaper than traditional methods – and it's in the store's interest to sort out problems quickly.

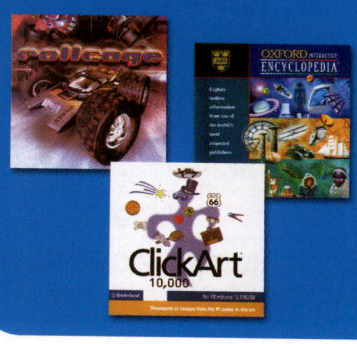
All you want from the Internet

Getting what you want from the Internet is important to you. So make sure the ISP you choose is the **right choice** for you and gives you total control. Over a million people have already discovered the benefits of accessing the Internet through **LineOne** and enjoy an award-winning service with superb content and plenty of extra features to make sure you get exactly what you want from the Internet quickly and easily.

- **Fast and reliable service**
  even better when you're connected you stay connected!
- **No subscription fee**
  all you pay for is your Internet calls as and when you connect
- **Get straight to what you want**
  a wide variety of content organised into easy to access categories
- **Best of the web**
  our powerful search engine and Best of the Web directory bring you the best of the Web
- **A great deal**
  fantastic shopping offers and exclusive member discounts!
- **24 hour online support**
  need help? email our helpdesk free at support@lineone.net

FREE GIFTS worth up to £34.99

Claim a FREE Multimedia CD-ROM and £5 amazon.co.uk book voucher when you join LineOne!



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* Minimum contract terms and conditions apply. Subject to availability. BT line required. Off-peak is Mon-Fri 6pm – 8am and all weekend

FOR YOUR FREE INTERNET START-UP PACK CALL

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LINE ONE

www.lineone.net

WHAT WEBSITE?

The Best of the Web

@ CHANNELS://

> MOVIES 60
Gangster films have never been more popular – especially on the Web

> MUSIC 62
Kick back and relax with our pick of the best classical sites around

> LEARNING 64
Let the Net turn you from culinary novice to budding Jamie Oliver

> SPORT 68
With the Grand National coming up stay one step ahead of the bookies

> TRAVEL 72
Treat yourself to a hassle-free day out by planning your trip online

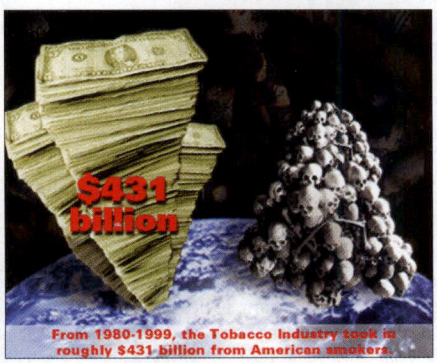
> MONEY 76
So many rates, so little time; you can compare in seconds while you surf

> HEALTH 80
Still not kept that resolution to quit smoking? Let the Web help…

> SOCIETY 82
We test the dating sites where swinging singles do their surfing

> THE DIRECTORY 86
Search engine rage is the latest Web worry – but with our A-Z round-up of essential sites, you'll be one cool cat

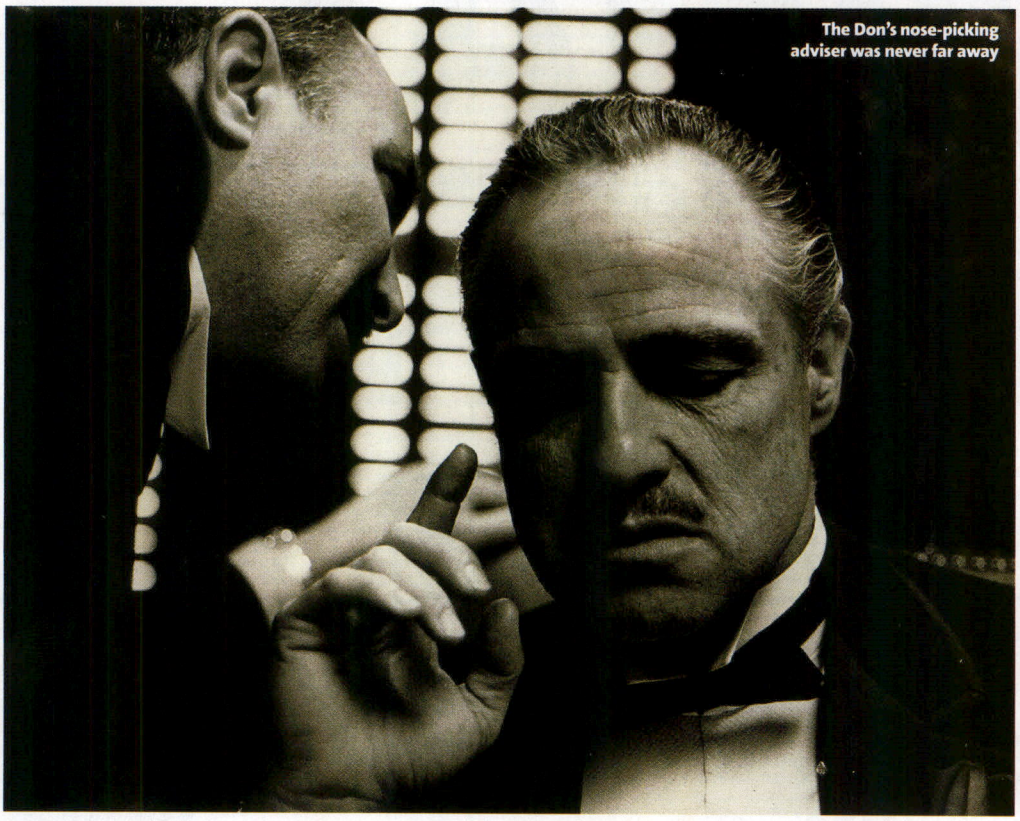
MOVIES 'Don't sell me a monkey, guv, I've got some shooters in the back…'



HEALTH Kick the habit with the Web

SPORT Tips to beat the bookies

FOCUS:// Gangsters



The Don's nose-picking adviser was never far away

Gang Webfare

The release of gangster comedy *The Mexican* sparks a search for goodfella sites

THE GODFATHER TRILOGY

www.jgeoff.com/godfather.html
★★★★★

You want Mafia? Well, Webmaster J Malta's got it well. From the first chapter of Coppola's classic drama to the quashed hopes of a possible fourth instalment, Mario Puzo's tale of family honour and gangland death in celluloid form is deftly covered by The Godfather Trilogy.

Along with synopses and photo galleries, you'll find scholarly movie facts, such as Clemenza's pasta sauce recipe ('start with a little oil...when boiling, add the sausages and meatballs...') and an inspired slide show featuring the infamous 'baptism scene' from *The Godfather*.

Full transcripts from the first two chapters can be downloaded from here, as can RealVideo clips and soundbites. A link to the online Amazon shop tempts you to buy the series on VHS (it should also be available on DVD later this year) as well as Mario Puzo's novels. Modern Mafia tales as told by HBO's *The Sopranos* are also available to buy from this site.

WISEGUYS: THE GOODFELLAS SITE

goodfellasweb.com ★★★★

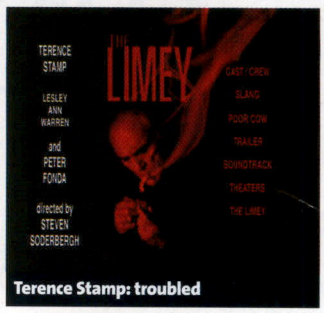
Mafia mayhem with a modern flair; Scorsese's acclaimed gangster drama has spawned quite a few Web sites, but Derek Soviak's Wiseguys: The Goodfellas Website is the best by far. Like The Godfather Trilogy site, Soviak's tribute is strong on RealAudio quotes and video clips, goodfella lingo (a 'Moustache Pete', for instance, refers to an early 1900s Mafia member) and *Goodfellas* wallpaper. Particularly interesting is the background on the true story that inspired the film and news briefs covering the latest mob activity in the US. If that's not enough, there's a message board to put you in touch with fans of *Goodfellas*, *The Sopranos* et al.

THE LIMEY

www.limey-themovie.com ★★★★

Seems director Steven Soderbergh is on a one-man mission to save Hollywood filmmaking and, boy, are we glad. In addition to his chock-full-o'-stars releases *Erin Brockovich* and this year's *Traffic*, Soderbergh released this curious gangster drama starring British institution Terence Stamp.

The official site of *The Limey* is as unconventional as the film itself: moody, atmospheric and blaring with classic rock tracks from the likes of The Who and Boston. It's enough to make your perception of time and place take a leap backward. As well as RealAudio music tracks, you'll find snippets of interviews with the cast and crew, and a trailer to download. Reams of text covering plot, production chaos, and inspired ideas make for joyful and inciteful reading.



Terence Stamp: troubled

Soderbergh's stroke of genius was to crosscut scenes from Ken Loach's 1967 drama *Poor Cow*, also starring Stamp, into *The Limey*, to create a troubled character whose history taps into the viewer's own memory. Moving stuff.

@ If you have to bookmark one...

SEXY BEAST

www.filmfour.com/sexybeast/launch.html ★★★★★

All hail director Jonathan Glazer! In addition to helming the award-winning 'Surfer' Guinness ad (you know, the one with the white horses) and producing Jamiroquai's *Virtual Insanity* video, he's made his big-screen debut with this gem. Loveable rogue Ray Winstone stars as a retired gangster whose idyllic lifestyle is upturned by the arrival of a psychotic ex-colleague, breathtakingly played by Ben Kingsley.

FilmFour.com's Sexy Beast site also deserves accolades. Beautifully simple in style, with muted scenes from the film providing a background to the pages, moving around the site is, thankfully, a cinch. As well as the expected synopsis and cast and crew write-ups, the RealPlayer downloads will get film fans' hearts racing. Interviews with the actors and director provide a 'straight from the horse's mouth' insight on what went into making the film. If you've seen *Sexy Beast*, you'll find it a particularly weird experience to watch Kingsley explain his character with all the calm and poise of a Buddhist monk.

The real clincher, however, are the eight video extras. It's little treats like these that make the Internet such a vital resource for anyone with an interest in film. Behind-the-scene shots of Glazer preparing the underwater robbery, Winstone rehearsing and then shooting a scene, the 'monster' wandering about the Spanish seaside sans rabbit ears (don't ask), Ben Kingsley taking a bullet, and how the crew managed a multi-ton boulder are the types of detail we'd hope to get from every film site. Sadly, not every one's as generous as FilmFour.com.

Sexy Web site with a cherry on top

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: KOBAL

RESERVOIR DOGS: LET'S GO TO WORK

www.electricpicturecompany.co.uk/reservoirdogs ★★★

Regardless of whatever backlash he's suffered since, Quentin Tarantino was hot property after this directorial debut. Jam-packed with snappy dialogue, gangsters and a soundtrack that inspired a resurgence in 70s-style iconic filmmaking, *Reservoir Dogs* neatly placed itself alongside the likes of *Point Blank* and *Fistful of Dollars* as a film which, once seen, is not soon forgotten.

Snatch: flashy guys, Flashy site

Of all the sites that celebrate the film, only Salil Tavkar's Reservoir Dogs: Let's Go to Work does it with the appropriate panache. The typesetting exudes the passion of a film boffin's fanzine, while Flash-driven touches add energy. Scrolling screens tell of behind-the-scenes action; theories on Mr. Pink's fate; facts and flaws, and character profiles. QuickTime trailers are available to download, as are MP3s of the soundtrack and audio dialogue clips (including Steve Wright's Mr. Kbilly). For all things *Dogs* this can't be beat.

SNATCH

www.snatch-themovie.com ★★★

Guy Ritchie's recent contributions to the modern gang comedy-drama are not to be laughed at: just take a look at the design of TV shows and adverts since 1998's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* to see the extent of its influence.

And while last year's *Snatch* may have been pretty much dismissed by the critics as more of the same, the site of the film is worthy of a few stars. Once again, a hefty dose of Flash is required to enjoy the modish design, where lines from the film and clickable images float by across a background featuring the official poster.

What stops this good site from being great, though, is the difficulty in figuring out what and where to click. Tiny thumbnail images of Brad Pitt, Jason Statham and Alan Ford skate across the screen (sometimes at an alarming rate) and pop-up windows featuring trailers, publicity photos, and a Acrobat-friendly essay appear.

GANGSTER NO.1

www.gangsterno1.co.uk ★★★

Upon its release, Paul McGuigan's 60s-set gangster drama elicited comparisons to *Lock, Stock...* and the inevitable accusations of bandwagon-jumping – mainly from those who hadn't taken the time to actually see the film.

Unlike Ritchie's mockney wise guy escapades, though, *Gangster No. 1* portrays a dark violence that few viewers will identify with or wish to imitate.

The film's site provides a chilling taster of the big screen experience, opening with vicious whisperings of 'I'll blow you to kingdom come; they'll need a dustpan and brush to bring you off the walls...' set against sweeping orchestrations. The level of violence is such that you are required to sign in before entering the site, stating that you're over 18. The precautions are certainly not a gimmick: the downloadable banned clips in particular are shockingly brutal.

Additionally, there's a chat room to discuss *Gangster No.1* with other users, still images and a now somewhat out-of-date Free Reggie Kray petition.

Gangsterno1.co.uk: extreme violence and an out-of-date Reggie Kray petition

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Ain't It Cool News: catch up on what's happening in the world of film here

MOVIE NEWS AND RELEASE DATES

Popcorn.co.uk
www.popcorn.co.uk
A British slant on releases.

Ain't It Cool News
aint-it-cool-news.com
For the inside track on what's new on screen.

Film Unlimited
www.filmunlimited.co.uk
Views from *The Guardian*.

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
uk.imdb.com
The bible of online film.

Filmreview.co.uk: opinions galore

MOVIE REVIEWS

Cinemachine
cinemachine.com
Retrieve film reviews from across the Web.

Filmreview.co.uk
www.filmreview.co.uk
A UK-based review site.

Movie Review Query Engine
www.mrqe.com
Features 19,000+ films.

The Trailer Park
www.movie-trailers.com
New trailers.

OFFICIAL FILM SITE RESOURCES

Fox Movies
www.foxmovies.com
Links to 20th Century Fox releases.

Warner Bros Online
www.movies.warnerbros.com
WB's new films and lost classics.

Disney Movies
www.disney.co.uk/DisneyMovies
All the kids' faves in one.

AMATEUR AND SHORT FILM WEB SITES

SightSound.com
www.sightsound.com
Features *The Quantum Project*.

in-movies
www.in-movies.com
Budding filmmakers may submit scripts here.

AtomFilms
www.atomfilms.com
Offers new filmmakers a chance to sell their wares.

MOVIE THEATRE DIRECTORIES

Odeon
www.odeon.co.uk
To book online, or peruse the very latest information.

Virgin Net – Movies
www.virgin.net/movies
Takes the hassle out of organising a trip to the cinema.

Cineworld – Multiplex Cinema
www.cineworld.co.uk
UK film portal that also includes a cinema finder.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

DVD Releases
uk.media.dvd
Keep track of what's coming out by chatting to others.

MAILING LIST

Join a film discussion group. Send an email marked 'info filmchat' to ***majordomo@lists.uoregon.edu***.

CHAT ROOM

www.film-philosophy.com
Read and discuss film articles here.

NEED MORE? **This month's movie sites** What's New p18
Useful media addresses The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Classical music

Have you got Mozart's latest?

Can't tell your aria from your oboe? These classical sites will save your blushes

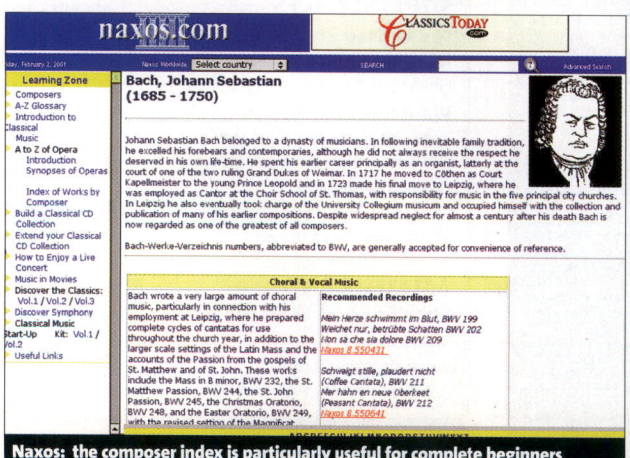
Classical concerts tend to attract rowdy crowds of bald men

@ If you have to bookmark one...

NAXOS.COM

www.naxos.com ★★★★★

Naxos is the record label that produces those budget-priced classical CDs found in music shops everywhere. Selling discs at just £5 a shot, it aims to make classical music accessible to everyone, so it's no surprise that the site shares that mission, and with equal success. The most immediately useful section for the complete beginner is the composer index, where you can read neat summaries of composers' careers and works, then find out what their music actually sounds like by sampling a track from one of Naxos' CDs. With hundreds of composers' works available to sample, this is the perfect way to work out what you like. Naxos appreciates that movie soundtracks often provide listeners with their first encounter with a classical piece they enjoy but can't identify, so the site includes an extensive list of movies and the classical pieces used in them (Bartók's spine-chilling *Music for Percussion, Strings and Celesta* in *The Shining*, for example, and R. Strauss's awe-inspiring *Also sprach Zarathustra* in *2001: A Space Odyssey*) and which Naxos CD you can find it on. It's a pity you can't buy the discs online, but the site suggests a number of mail order services and in any case the label's ubiquity makes its titles easy enough to buy in the high street. The Learning Zone includes helpful explanations of musical terms, forms and instruments as well as an excellent potted history of classical music and a section giving synopses of plots to a long list of operas. There's also plenty here for the more seasoned enthusiast, such as regular news and expert opinions from top classical music critics, and you can keep your ears open for new discoveries while browsing by listening to Naxos Radio via the site.



Naxos: the composer index is particularly useful for complete beginners

GLOBAL MUSIC NETWORK

www.gmn.com ★★★

If you can't find a sample of a particular composer or work on Naxos' site (***www.naxos.com***), it's worth checking the substantial list of own-label recordings at the gargantuan GMN. The quickest way is to use the Music Search on the homepage, but you can also access samples via the composer biography pages or by scanning the respective lists of works. GMN also has an enormous shopping site with a search facility to find all the available CDs, on any label, which include your chosen piece of music. For inspiration, you can check the week's Top Ten; for more guidance email the GMN Classical Editor. The site is best suited to experienced classical fans, as besides the biographies taken from the *Grove Concise Dictionary of Music*, there's no other information.

CLASSICAL NET

www.classical.net ★★★★

It's a pity this site doesn't offer audio samples, as it does so well in every other way. While texts in quantity are usually off-putting, the tone here appeals, managing to impart information and advice in a friendly manner without being patronising or overly simplified. The layout is crude in places but never distracts from the actual content. The abundance of information on offer includes a guide to working out which pieces you like, detailed composer biographies, summaries of the main musical eras and recommended recordings to get you started. The 1,650 CD reviews pale in comparison to a database like Gramophone's, but if you're making your first tentative steps into classical music, this is a great place to find your feet.

GRAMOPHONE

www.gramophone.co.uk ★★★★

If you're just starting to build a classical CD collection, you might as well get off on the right foot by choosing the best recordings. The site of *Gramophone*, the prestigious classical music magazine, offers access to its database of 25,000 CD reviews. Penned by an extensive panel of some of the world's most respected music critics and academics, the musicological detail and occasionally dry tone might appeal more to the experienced music lover, but the reviews aren't the only string to this detailed site's bow. When we visited, it was headed for a face-lift, with promised new features including audio clips and the option to buy discs via the site, as well as composer and artist

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: PA

biographies and a dictionary of musical terms which will help new listeners to decipher some of the more technical passages in the texts. The site is packed with news, events, links and features, plus the monthly Editor's Choice of 10 discs.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

www.classicalmusic.co.uk ★★★

Classical Music wants to make the point that 'beauty and talent are not mutually exclusive' through a series called Fit Fiddlers on this slightly quirky site. Too bad we don't get to see a little more of the dishy Joshua Bell or the luscious Anne-Sofie Mutter. The site has a pleasantly surprising, if slightly smug, sense of humour that belies classical music's somewhat fusty reputation; we particularly liked How to Survive a Concert, which covers everything from how to identify the conductor to knowing when to clap. While much of the site is aimed at established classical fans, the beginner will benefit from the Jargon Buster and the recommended 100 essential works. Links from the site take you to useful downloads and shopping services.

Reviews are not the only string to this detailed site's bow

THE CLASSICAL MUSIC PAGES

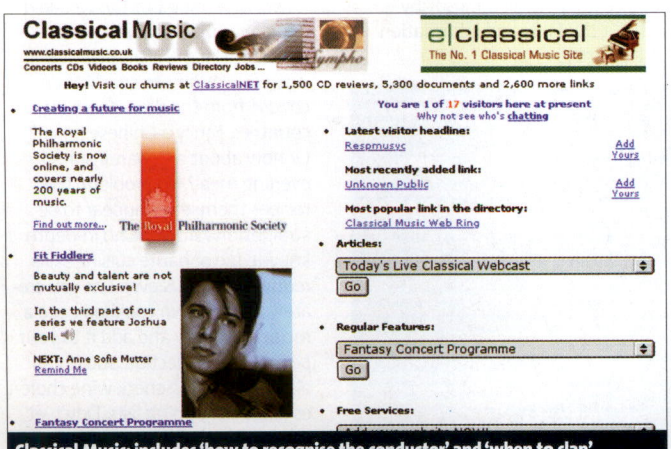
W3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/classmus.html ★★★

As with GMN and Gramophone's Web sites, much of the text here comes from the *Grove Concise Dictionary of Music*, a potted version of the multi-volume work widely regarded as the ultimate reference source for classical music. You have to pay to access all of Grove online (***www.grovemusic.com***) so this is a good way to get a large portion of select cuts for free. The quantity of text on this site and its occasionally academic tone can make it a little stodgy, but there's still plenty here that's useful for the newcomer, like the option to hear the beginning of each movement (main section) of selected works. It's a little disappointing to find a section as basic as Musical Instruments under revision, and a few other entries also begging completion, but beginners should welcome the gentle simplicity and easy navigation of this useful reference site.

CLASSICAL HUB.COM

www.classicalhub.com ★★★

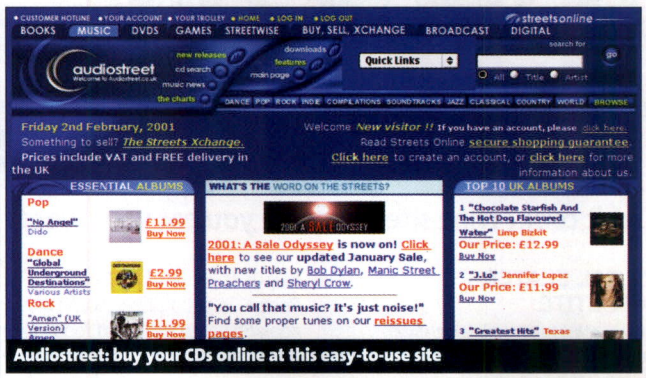
Although still under construction when we visited (it's due for launch in March), ClassicalHub is a polished-looking site reminiscent in places of a good A-level text book, which is ideal if you're looking for an informative but uncomplicated initiation into the classical world. There's also a handy section for absolute beginners which includes explanations of music terms and how to read music, in case you want to follow the score. Classical music lovers of all levels will enjoy the Listening Booth, particularly when the piece you want to hear comes complete with helpful background notes. The Composer Center, meanwhile, includes biographies and full lists of works; click through for a selection of in-depth but accessible articles which manage to be informative without being overwhelming. Other resources that are planned include a music dictionary, opera texts and concert information.



Classical Music: includes 'how to recognise the conductor' and 'when to clap'

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Audiostreet: buy your CDs online at this easy-to-use site

BAND SITES

UBL.com
www.ubl.com
Go here first for the huge search engine.

Bigmouth
www.bigmouth.co.uk
UK-specific site with tons of links.

Wall of Sound
wallofsound.go.com
Links and features from the US.

NME.com: hot news, features and reviews

NEWS AND REVIEWS

RollingStone.com
www.rollingstone.com
The US publication features extra online content.

NME.com
www.nme.com
NME's online version has a reputation for breaking news.

Spin
www.spin.com/V2/home/index.html
Online version of the edgy US music mag.

GIGS AND TOURS

Ticketlinks
www.ticketlinks.com
Full database of musical events.

Aloud.com
www.aloud.com
Brilliant search engine for gigs.

SceneOne
www.sceneone.co.uk
Easy-to-use guide.

Way Ahead
www.wayahead.com
Competitively priced tickets.

BUYING CDS

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Used CDs, actually, but the prices are unbeatable.

Audiostreet
www.audiostreet.co.uk
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Cheap chart CDs.

recordstore.co.uk
www.recordstore.co.uk
'*The* home of dance music retail on the Net'.

MP3s

CMJ
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MP3 portal, with newsy bits.

MP3.com
www.mp3.com
Heaps of downloads.

POST YOUR BAND'S MP3s

iCrunch
www.crunch.co.uk
Signs artists exclusively for the site.

peoplesound.com
www.peoplesound.com
A popular unsigned band portal.

Clickmusic
www.clickmusic.co.uk
Excellent MP3 portal.

NEWSGROUP

rec.music.classical
Chat about all things classical with other music fans here.

MAILING LIST

Join a classical music discussion group by sending an email marked 'info CLASSICA' to ***listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu***.

NEED MORE? **Useful music addresses** The Directory p86
MP3 guide Everything you need to know p32

FOCUS:// How to cook

A wok on the wild side

Can't cook? Nine sites to make you eat your words

NIGEL SLATER – APPETITE

www.4thestate.co.uk/nigelslater/appetite.htm ★★★★

Nigel Slater is one of the best cookery writers around, his prose as sublime and mouthwatering as his recipes. He helped demystify the 'art' of cooking with his calm manner, refusal to panic if things weren't going exactly to plan and his relaxed approach to ingredient quantities (a few glugs of oil for a pasta dish). The laid-back approach and love of cooking that suffuses every page of his books is equally evident on this site. Although essentially a trailer for his latest tome, the site's no poorer for it. Elegantly designed and simple to use (albeit brief), it provides background info on the man himself, a summary of his new book and a few of its recipes, plus 'Today's Recipe'. To get a taster (sorry) of his cooking and some good food log on and learn that cooking isn't a chore.

Nigel Slater: down-to-earth approach

CHOPSTIX

www.chopstix.co.uk ★★★★

If the thought of chicken in hot bean sauce with warm, stir fried noodles does it for you, learn how to prepare and cook Chinese dishes yourself courtesy of this informed and knowledgeable site. Notes on ingredients, a brief page on China's cultural history and the opportunity to swap notes in the chat rooms are all part of the menu. The inclusion of a section on the theory behind Chinese cooking is a stroke of genius, but recipes are, of course, the site's raison d'etre and it has them by the wok-load. They're easy to find and locate by category of meal type – vegetables, poultry, dim sum and so on – and there are also dishes by famous Chinese chefs such as Ken Hom. An exhaustive supply of recipes includes the intriguingly named Lions' Heads (pork meatballs, since you ask) and the Eight Jewel Rice Pudding (rice pudding decorated with candied fruits). The perfect Chinese takeaway.

KATE'S (VEGAN) COOKERY SITE

www.ox.compsoc.net/~kake/cookery ★★★

What this site lacks in professional polish it makes up for with sheer enthusiasm for its subject: animal-free cookery. Lack of choice is not a problem. Choose your recipe by meal (lunch, dinner, snack); region (Greek, Indian, Italian); ingredient (fruit, vegetable, pulses); by...well, you get the idea. Kate's Vegan Cookery Site may not have Delia quaking in her pinny and the layout won't win any design awards, but it's easy enough to navigate and the recipes are clearly written, with handy little notes in the cooking instructions.

E-LICIOUS

www.e-licious.co.uk ★★★★★

From American to Vietnamese food, E-licious brings the culinary delights of the global village within a pan's reach of your tastebuds. The choice is overwhelming but the well-laid out site makes it easy to get around: decide which meal you want (lunch, dinner, snack) then choose from the drop-down list of countries. Fancy a Chinese lunch? Or how about a Cuban-inspired evening meal? No problem. The recipes themselves appear to be straightforward, with no in-depth knowledge or haute cuisine skills required. E-licious even lets you create your very own cookbook; see a recipe you fancy and add it to your personalised selection. You're can also plan menus, check wine choices and do shopping lists. Don't let the fact you need to register put you off. It's well worth your while.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: KOBAL, REX

@ If you have to bookmark one...

NEW YORK SEAFOOD COUNCIL

www.nyseafood.org ★★★★★

From blackfish to lobster to scallops, this site will teach you all you need to know about our tasty little piscine friends. Well laid-out and easy to navigate, New York's Seafood Council has provided an incredibly detailed and informative site on the health benefits of fish, cooking methods – and of course, a variety of recipes. On the fun opening page, clicking on Nutrition takes you to various health options regarding fish: worth checking out as the facts are written in a clear, accessible style. Fish is known to be a healthy food, but here you get direct comparisons with other sources of protein, plus a close look at the specific benefits of each fish and their relative fat contents; generally, the whiter the fish, the lower the fat content. A handy guide lists the nutritional content – calories, vitamins – of different fish according to the cooking method used. Each type of seafood also has its own CV, listing where it's found, most suitable cooking methods and availability. No mention of hobbies though...The recipe section is broken down into types of fish: simply click on your choice of seafood, and choose from the menu of recipes. They are clearly written and easy to follow, with varying degrees of difficulty. An informative site, and a perfect reference guide to all things fishy – and, although it's American, the facts and information are all relevant to a UK audience.

Go fishing for recipes with the New York Seafood Council

'Couldn't manage rare – is charred OK?'

EPICURIOUS

www.epicurious.com ★★★★

This is definitely one for those who prefer their food gourmet to boil-in-the-bag. Peppered chicken, pineapple and arugula salad, veal rib chops with caramelized fennel and figs, and coconut macadamia truffle are just three of the 12,000 plus recipes on offer, so even the fussiest of eaters should find something that appeals. Although some of the recipes sound rather intimidating (roast capon with chile cilantro rub) or outright disgusting (puckle warts, anyone?), this elegant and professional site contains much to challenge cooks, and the recipes are actually fairly straightforward. In addition to the recipe collection there's a recipe of the day – crisp duck breast with pink peppercorn sauce when we visited – plus a Quick Tips section, including fast meals and hints for entertaining. Although aimed at the upper end of the market (suggested fillings for baked potatoes include slices of foie gras), Epicurious has plenty of ideas to tempt the interested foodie.

MEALS FOR YOU

www.mealsforyou. com ★★★★

For ideas and suggestions on a huge variety of diets, you're unlikely to find a more comprehensive site »

LINKS ;-) LESS USEFUL THINGS

Little time, much to learn

'Once you stop learning, you're dead.' Whoever it was that came out with that sage advice would have been simultaneously delighted and horrified with the Internet and its amazing capacity to teach the world How To... for better, for worse and for the downright puzzling.

The power of the Web to inform and educate can be a wonderful thing; untold numbers of students are finding it far easier to gen up on exam topics through revision sites than dusty old text books. Then again, last year's arrest of a sociopathic bomber in London created a predictable media panic when he revealed he'd discovered how to make bombs on the Net.

Surfing can expand your mind in thousands of ways

But besides those sites which advance or retard society, there are a number which take it sideways. Would the world be better or worse off if everyone on Earth went to ***basketry.about.com*** and perfected the art of basket-weaving?

Sites like About (***www.about.com***) can teach you a lot about things you will never, ever need to know. From getting the right materials – in this case, measuring tape, scissors, water bucket, awl, knife, and clamps – to meeting likeminded folks online, it's a fair bet that your chosen field will be well represented. Even if the time you spend in your field is put to use building dry-stone walls.

And what would be the effect on the world if we all became dry-stone wall enthusiasts? Would we be surrounded by aesthetically pleasing but unsteady structures? Similarly, would anarchy ensue if everyone went to ***www.paperairplanes.co.uk*** and became origami aeronautical engineers? Within minutes of discovering the site our office was awash with unlicensed air traffic and productivity plummeted.

That's the root of the problem: you have to set time to learn aside from the rigours of daily life. Many might say that they dedicated their first couple of decades to learning and have been working ever since, but we know these people will never discover the joy of learning the drums, as you can at ***home.att.net/~drumso1***. You don't need a drumkit, just bang on your computer desk. That'll please the rest of the family. But then if they do kick up you could learn to play air guitar instead at ***mirrorimage.com/air***. Just don't plug it in.

The truth is, as you sit and surf you can expand your mind in thousands of ways, and not all of them will benefit the planet. And that's another thing: some of these hobbies take a lot of learning. While browsing casually through About's section on beadwork (***beadwork.about.com***), for example, it's impossible to ignore the section entitled How To Warp A Loom: 'Specific instructions for that extremely important process in loom weaving, warping your loom'. Take it easy out there, keen learners: you may never return.

Too much surfing can turn you into a basket case

FOCUS:// How to cook <cont>

than Meals for You. Low-calorie diet? Menus galore. Low-fat? It can help. Wheat-free? Dairy-free? Diabetic? Kosher? You got it. The site caters for all types of dietary demands with lists upon lists of menu suggestions, most of which are straightforward and easy to prepare. Each recipe is accompanied by fat, carbohydrate, cholesterol and calorie values, plus an at-a-glance guide to preparation and cooking times. And, although it's an American site, quantities can be changed to British weights, so no more translating a 'cup' into old money. In addition to the special diet solutions, Meals for You also has Quick Recipes, sections on nutrition and gadgets – choose your weapon (microwave, deep fryer, food processor) then follow a, er, matching recipe. Exhaustive and a bit of a mission to explore, but you'll never be stuck for dinner ideas again.

Meals for You: special needs food

You'll never be stuck for dinner ideas again

NIGELLA BITES

www.channel4.com/nextstep/nigella

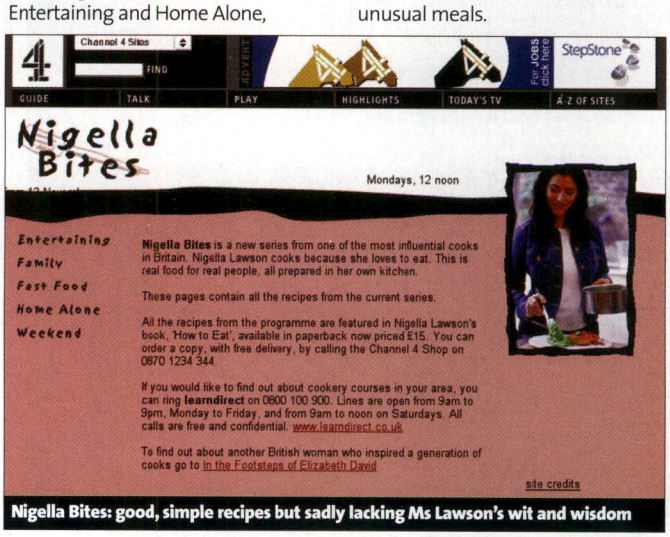
★★★★

Unlike some of the fussier cookery sites out there, Nigella Bites is easy to digest in one and quick to view. Tied in to Ms Lawson's TV series, aired last year, and her respected book, *How to Eat*, this site is constructed in small, perfectly formed bites. A short, straight to the point home page briefly introduces the series and book, listing the recipe sections – a very ungreedy five – alongside. The section headings, including Fast Food, Weekend, Entertaining and Home Alone, house a selection of recipes taken from her book: straightforward meals that are easy to prepare. Choose from recipes ranging from Marmite sandwiches to griddled chicken with herb-spiked yoghurt and couscous; there's something for everyone. And that's it: no funky add-ons or complicated meals. One complaint, though: the site fails to capture the essence of the book. By dispensing with the accompanying musings on eating, it misses the essence of what makes Nigella such a domestic goddess.

SIMPLY RECIPES

www.simply-recipes.com ★★★

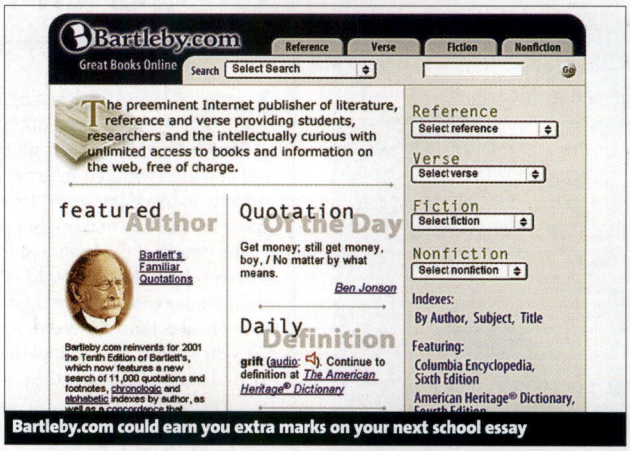
Contains exactly what it says on the packet: simply recipes, no more, no less. Functional, no frills, it's the Internet equivalent of Sainsbury's Economy range. It's also a cyber swap shop for recipes: try to exchange your Aunt Rosie's Gob Cake for a Pickled Pig's Feet appetizer (both of which can be found online here). If neither of these sounds particularly appealing, don't worry; there are many, many more to choose from. The recipes themselves seem pretty simple and easy to make and include useful nutritional breakdowns (fat, calorie and cholesterol contents) for each. Alternatively, check out the recipes posted on the site by fellow foodies – or, of course, if you have a burning desire to share Great Aunt Ethel's secret Eccles cake recipe, you can post your own. A site to check out for more unusual meals.



Nigella Bites: good, simple recipes but sadly lacking Ms Lawson's wit and wisdom

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



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Learn 30 languages completely free of charge.

FreeTranslation.com
www.freetranslation.com
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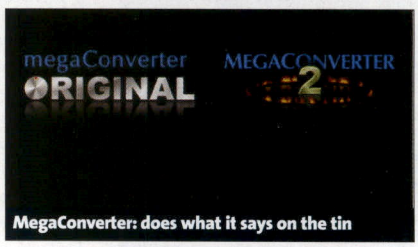

MegaConverter: does what it says on the tin

QUOTATIONS AND PROVERBS

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www.bartleby.com
Spice up your essays with a quote.

Famous Quotations Network
www.famous-quotations.com
Search for quotations by country or author.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Webopedia
www.pcwebopedia.com
Specialises in IT topics.

Online Dictionaries, Glossaries and Encyclopedias
stommel.tamu.edu/~baum/hyperref.html
Large list of online resources.

FunkandWagnalls.com
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Selection of historical articles and a perspective on modern events.

EXAM RESOURCES

Topmarks Education
www.topmarks.co.uk
Help with hundreds of topics.

Kevin's Playroom
www.kevinsplayroom.co.uk
Boasts links for every subject on the curriculum.

Learn.co.uk
www.learn.co.uk
Providing useful tips for five- to 19-year-olds.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The Open University
www-icdl.open.ac.uk
The Open University on the Net.

Tele-School Online
www.tele-school.org
Learn online and interact, too.

CONVERTERS AND SYMBOLS

MegaConverter
www.megaconverter.com
Convert from just about anything to anything else, including weights and summaries.

Symbols.com
www.symbols.com
Online list of graphic symbols.

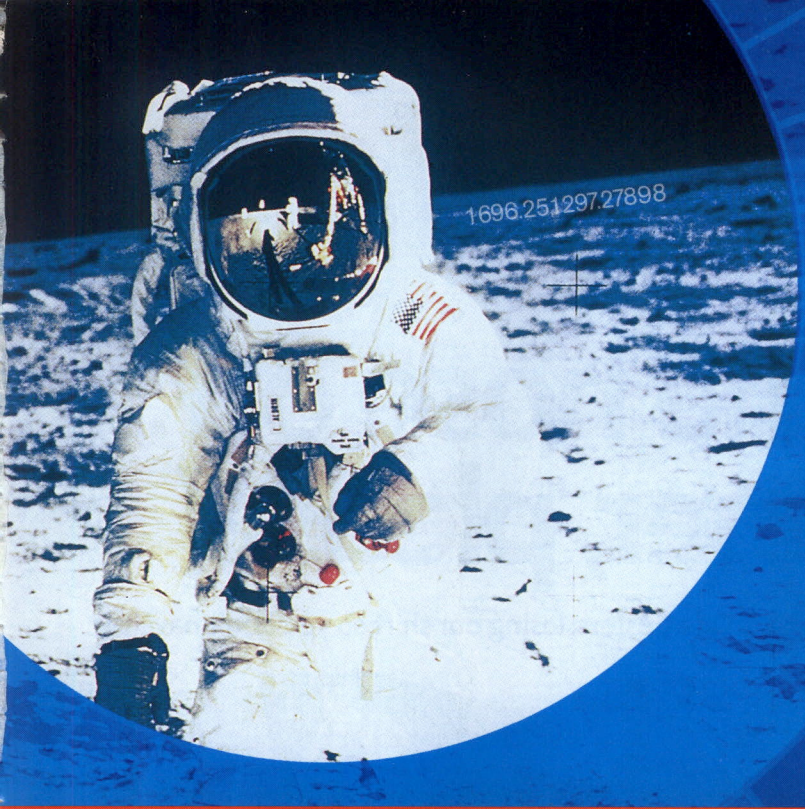
TRY A NEWSGROUP

rec.food.cooking
Discuss foodie matters with fellow eaters here.

CHAT ROOM

Smart Wine Chat
www.smartwine.com/chat
Wondering what to drink along with that perfect meal? Get a recommendation from a fellow buff here.

NEED MORE? Useful food addresses The Directory p86



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MOMENTS IN HISTORY #2
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FOCUS:// Racing tipsters

'A pony on the nose on Surefire Winner, please'

It's Grand National time soon – so we checked out the online tipsters, losing our shirt so you don't have to

'I'm gonna win today...'

THE RACING POST

www.racingpost.co.uk ★★★★

When it comes to tips, the Racing Post leads its old rival the Sporting Life by several lengths. The Post does for the newspaper tipsters what Relayline does for the subscription services, combing dozens of national, regional and sporting titles and presenting their daily recommendations on one easy-to-follow Web page. Not that you'd want to follow it too closely; of the 13 national newspaper tipsters listed, only two are showing a profit on a notional £1 bet on each selection. Hyperion in the *Independent* is up a huge £12 but Tony Stafford in the *Telegraph* would have cost you £85 since the start of the season. But successful tipsters handicap themselves – if too many punters follow their advice their winners will come in at reduced prices, cutting their returns. This site is a useful resource, but if you want the real dope look elsewhere.

ODDSCHECKER

www.oddschecker.co.uk ★★★★

Getting the right odds on the horse you've chosen is absolutely critical. Oddschecker lets you see what all the bookies are offering from one site; once you've seen the right price on Oddschecker you can often link straight to the bookie offering it. But the site will also help you choose which horse to back in the first place. Using your expert knowledge, you think a horse has a 4-1 chance of winning. You find a bookie offering 6-1, so you bet 10 quid. If you've got the odds right you'll lose this bet four times in five, costing you £40. But in one race in five your horse will come in and you'll win £60. This is called value betting, and it's the way professional punters make their money. Still a novice? Oddschecker's jargon-free betting guide and glossary are first-rate and will make a power punter out of you.

FANTASY RACING

www.fantasy-racing.co.uk ★★★★

Competing in Fantasy Racing is just like being a tipster; you can go for big bets on long shots without having to risk any of your own cash. It's a great place for the nervous or poor to start. You begin the month with a notional £1,000; the aim is to increase your bankroll by making up to six bets each day, with £150 in real cash each month for the league champions. You can get tips by looking at your rivals' selections or use the site to test your latest system or tipping line, and you can make virtual bets on races around the world. There's also the chance to play the bookie in the Bismarck competition, identifying the horse most likely to lose.

NICK MORDIN

www.nickmordin.com ★★★★

You might not have heard of Nick Mordin but the bookies certainly »

@ If you have to bookmark one...

RELAYLINE

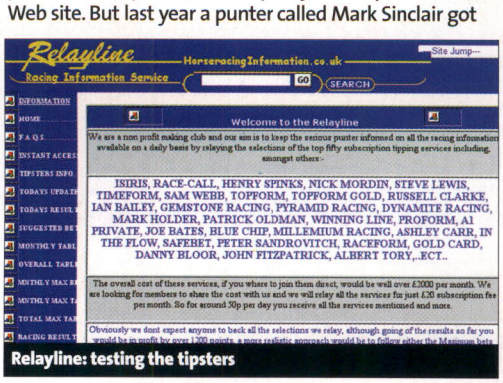
www.horseracinginformation.co.uk ★★★★★

There are hundreds of self-styled racing tipsters out there, all offering 'unrivalled' inside information in return for a premium-rate phone call or a pricey subscription to their Web site. But last year a punter called Mark Sinclair got curious about their promises of vast profits; if such claims were true, how were the bookies still in business?

So he tested them, recording how much you would have won or lost had you followed their selections. As expected, most were dire, the cost of the subscription dwarfed by the losses incurred by their hapless disciples. But a few turned out to be the real deal, and this gave Mark the idea for the best tips service on the Web.

It works like this. Mark's site Relayline subscribes to the 50 best tipsters in the business. For 20 sheets a month you get access to selections that would cost you over two grand if you subscribed individually. As well as checking their daily selections you can see how they have performed since Mark started monitoring them.

But the site's best feature is Mark's daily pick of the picks. Had you started with £1,000 in September and followed Mark's advice your bankroll would now be up to over £6,000. Don't believe him? You're right to be sceptical, but Mark's daily selections and profit or loss are archived and easily checked. We tested the site for a week, and would have made nearly £200 profit, laying out about that amount each day. Almost makes you pity the bookies. Almost.



Relayline: testing the tipsters

the spin ROOM
THE ONLINE CASINO

www.thespinroom.com

FOCUS:// Racing tipsters <cont>

have. He's one of the country's top racing journalists but also an acclaimed tipster; his innovative speed ratings and betting systems are trusted by punters. Speed ratings help you gauge how fast a horse is, allowing for variables like weather and weight carried; a betting system is a set of calculations you can apply to a field in order to pick the winner. Like many big-name tipsters Mordin has his own site. It's one of the slickest to use and offers plenty in return for your cash; and though the information is far from exclusive and tips never come with a money-back guarantee, at least you can be confident that it hasn't just been made up by some bloke sitting at home chain-smoking Embassies.

Fantasy racing: no risk site

A great place for the nervous or poor

FLATSTATS

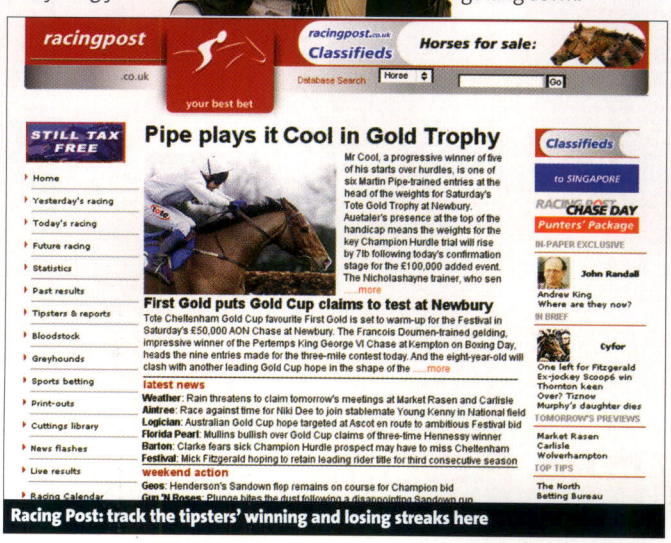
www.flatstats.co.uk ★★★★

Power to the punter: Flatstats is the anti-tipster tips site. Instead of paying for the dubious predictions of an online expert, Flatstats urges you to do it yourself. You might not have an inside man in Newmarket but you can make an educated guess about a horse's chances with access to the right information. Racegoers are like cricketers; they're obsessed by statistics. For £20 a month Flatstats gives you everything you're likely to need. It has a database of nearly half a million individual performances which can be searched by horse, jockey, trainer or bloodline. And if you think you've stumbled across a winning system you can run it through the database to find out if you're the next John McCririck – but for your sake, we hope not.

WIN 2 WIN RACING

www.win2win.co.uk ★★★

Win 2 Win earns inclusion here for offering just about the only entirely free tips service we could find. The tipster running the site doesn't reveal his identity for fear of being blacklisted by the bookies. But in the week we followed his advice he put in a reasonable performance; we'd have generated a solid profit had we backed all his selections. There's also a useful section explaining staking systems, which help you protect your bankroll by limiting the proportion you stake according to the odds you're getting. Find out more about such terminology at ***www.sportsbetting.com***, which includes also an excellent glossary of US betting terms, vital if you want to bet on baseball and the rest and don't know your exposure from your extension or the difference between going down and getting down.



Racing Post: track the tipsters' winning and losing streaks here

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

FourFourTwo: Britain's top football magazine can also be found online

LATEST NEWS AND SCORES

ESPN.com
espn.go.com
Scores for all sports, with a distinctly American bias.

Sky Sports
www1.sky.com/sports
Forget begrudging the TV subscription fee – this is hot sports news from Sky that comes free of charge.

Soccernet
www.soccernet.com
Score flashes from all UK games (part of the ESPN network).

Sporting Life
www.sporting-life.com
News, scores and betting advice on everything from football to the NFL.

TOP FOOTBALL SITES

Football365.com
www.football365.com
Humour, news and plenty of features.

FourFourTwo
www.fourfourtwo.com
The online home of Britain's best football magazine.

Teamtalk
www.teamtalk.com
Independent club news service.

soccer-links.com
www.soccer-links.com
Links for world sites.

FOR MORE ONLINE BETS

Blue Square
www.bluesq.com
Best-known online bookie.

Sporting Index
www.sportingindex.com
The biggest spread-betting site.

Victor Chandler
www.victorchandler.com
User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.

Soccernet: all the scores at a click

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE

PlanetFootball.com
www.planetfootball.com
Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.

Sport On Air
www.sportonair.com
Host of bang up-to-date streamed broadcasts, covering news from football to cricket.

talkSPORT
www.talksport.net
Listen to the radio station's sports coverage as it happens.

SITES FOR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

planet-rugby.com
www.planet-rugby.com
Where the oval ball rules – hot news from around the globe.

Atlas F1
www.atlasf1.com
News, articles and chat from the online motoring magazine.

CricInfo
www-uk.cricket.org
The ultimate ball-on-willow site; news and statistics galore.

FIND A NEWSGROUP

alt.sport.horse-racing
Pick up last-minute tips here.

FIND A MAILING LIST

Join a horse-racing discussion. Send an email to ***european-horseracing-owner@makelist.com***.

NEED MORE? **Useful sports addresses** The Directory p86

WORDS: BEN OLIVER; PICTURE: PA, REX

play for real

the spin ROOM
THE ONLINE CASINO

www.thespinroom.com

FOCUS:// Fun days out online

Get out and do something

Don't let your day off be a day wasted with the best online suggestions

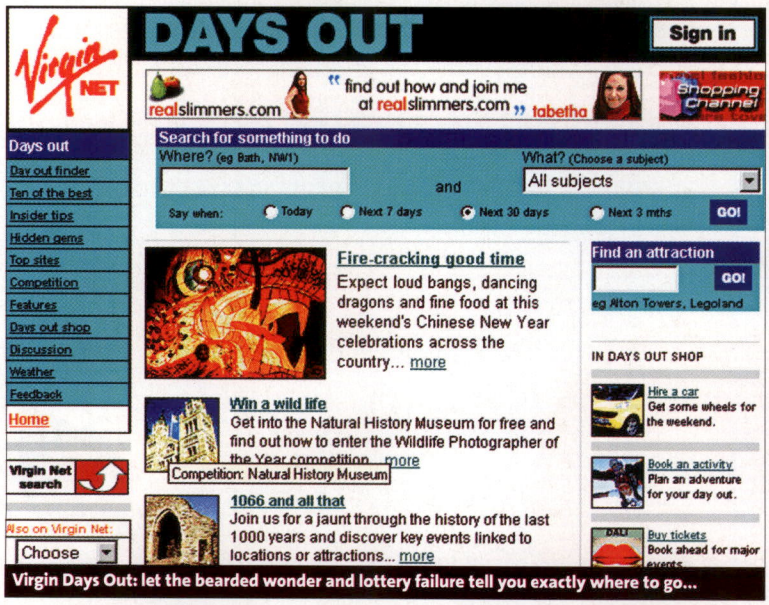
@ If you have to bookmark one...

VIRGIN NET: DAYS OUT

www.virgin.net/daysout/ ★★★★★

He may have one hell of a job getting you there, but Richard Branson is certainly keeping this site on the right track. The search facility is superb, boasting an easy-to-use selection of options that always returns an impressive scope of results, ranging from major amusement parks to the most obscure little things such as picnic sites and brass band concerts. Not only can you search by keyword or subject, but also by your postcode, a seriously clever feature that other sites should take note of. Using this option will even tell you how far each attraction is from your home, and combines with links to weather reports and maps.

Another strong element of the site is the editorial content. The 'hidden gems' section uncovers odd and obscure places of interest around the country and in addition there is a good selection of general features, providing an excellent source of inspiration for those who might be struggling to find someplace interesting to go. Once you have settled on a destination you can avail yourself of other free elements of the Virgin online empire, such as the Restaurant Finder, but naturally enough Richard is not going to miss a trick in parting you with your money and so you can expect plenty of enticements to his commercial offerings. In truth, however, with so much useful information to hand, who can really object to a little honest commerce – especially when some of it is actually quite useful.



Virgin Days Out: let the bearded wonder and lottery failure tell you exactly where to go...

ABOUT BRITAIN

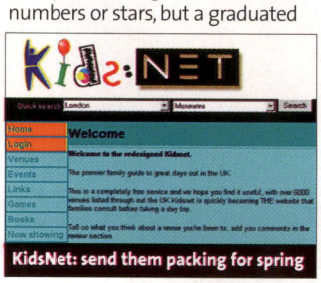
www.aboutbritain.com ★★★★★

Like the excellent 'Virgin days out' page, About Britain will allow you to enter your own post code and thereby see a selection of nearby venues, though in this case the results seem to be more biased toward museums, country houses and other national institutions. And although the site doesn't make any claim to be a resource for foreign tourists, because of this apparent editorial slant it does have that feel. However, this is not to say that those seeking a good day out should shun About Britain. The presentation and content is exemplary, with very well-written and topical articles backed up by a seriously in-depth database. Over 500 towns and 1000 attractions are listed, and while not all these will necessarily appeal as a great family day out, the sheer number of permutations will certainly prove fruitful.

KIDSNET.

www.kidsnet.co.uk ★★★★

You can't really bring yourself to find fault with a site that asks you to vote on the quality of a venue, not by something so mundane as numbers or stars, but a graduated scale that starts with the brutally honest phrase 'I'd rather eat worms'. Actually, on a first viewing, it's not instantly obvious just how good or bad a venue is due to the rather ambiguous way in which these ratings are presented, but to save you the vexation of working it out, just remember that the more orange bars, the better the attraction. Aside from this minor gripe, this site has plenty to offer. You can search by an impressive set of criteria, and while the depth of information is a little shallow in comparison to some of the other sites we looked at, there are plenty of added value features to compensate, such as a seriously useful ability to enter your post code and generate a route map to your chosen destination of fun.



KidsNet: send them packing for spring

24-HOUR MUSEUM

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

★★★★

So it's not always the most popular choice for a day out, but you know that as responsible parents, it's your duty to drag the kids round a learning institution at least once a month. You can choose your destination by a number of criteria, the easiest being just to click on an interactive map for a list of all the museums in your particular area. The advanced search has some rather nice filters, allowing you for instance to specify only those museums that offer food and baby change facilities. You can even tie in your search to national curriculum requirements so, though you don't have to tell them, you'll be helping the little monsters with their schoolwork. However, to end on a serious note, it is a shame that the site is not presented in a more lighthearted manner as it might just encourage youngsters to see the experience of visiting a museum in a positive light.

DAYSOUTUK

www.daysoutuk.com ★★★★

Affiliated to a traditional printed guidebook, you can be assured of lashings of useful information at DaysOutUK, with the added bonus of printable money-off coupons for some of the listed attractions. All the sites are rated, and you can even add your own opinions to the database, which in turn contributes to that overall rating. Good stuff, yet rather irritatingly you are forced to search using a set of dropdown menus that are anything but user-friendly. Here is a perfect example of the advantages of a simply conceived and executed concept versus one that has succumbed to the sort of over-design that has proved so fatal to many a site. The use of pop-up boxes is also a bit laboured, so for want of a little restraint, DaysOutUK loses out.

PLANIT4KIDS

www.planit4kids.com ★★★★

Actually, this is the focal point of seven other Web sites, each focusing on a major city. With London to the south and Glasgow to the north, the coverage can just about be described as national in scope, though if you live far from a major metropolitan area you can expect to factor in some significant travel time. Given that you can choose to view events for the next seven days, you would be justified in expecting a service of this type to maintain some serious topicality and, bar for the inclusion of some Christmas events in January, it succeeds well enough in this regard. Top marks

The Kilshaws were delighted with their special delivery

WORDS: JOHN GOSLING; PICTURES: CORBIS, NEWSMAKERS

also for the significant emphasis on special needs venues and events, an important area often rather lacking on other sites. The navigation is a tad laborious and the inclusion of an online diary something of a pointless affectation, but if they can expand their coverage to include more cities, Planit4Kids could really be onto a winner.

THEME PARKS OF ENGLAND

tpoe.virtualave.net ★★★★

If you want to know where to find the scariest, fastest, most stomach-churning amusement rides in the country, this is a pretty good place to start. Here you will find reviews of over 80 rides, most of the major theme parks and even the odd seaside pier. Presented in a magazine format, the latest issue takes a useful if depressing look at the state of park access for the disabled, and reviews Chessington World Of Adventure, though the somewhat immature writing style and occasional spelling gaff is not likely to convince readers that this site represents a wholly authoritative opinion. However, the undeniable quantity of features on the site makes up for the variable quality. And to be charitable, perhaps one too many high-G plunges on a rollercoaster has addled the Webmaster's wits, because surely no one in his right mind would use pale yellow hyperlinks on a white background.

KIDS TRAVEL

www.kidstravel.co.uk ★★★★

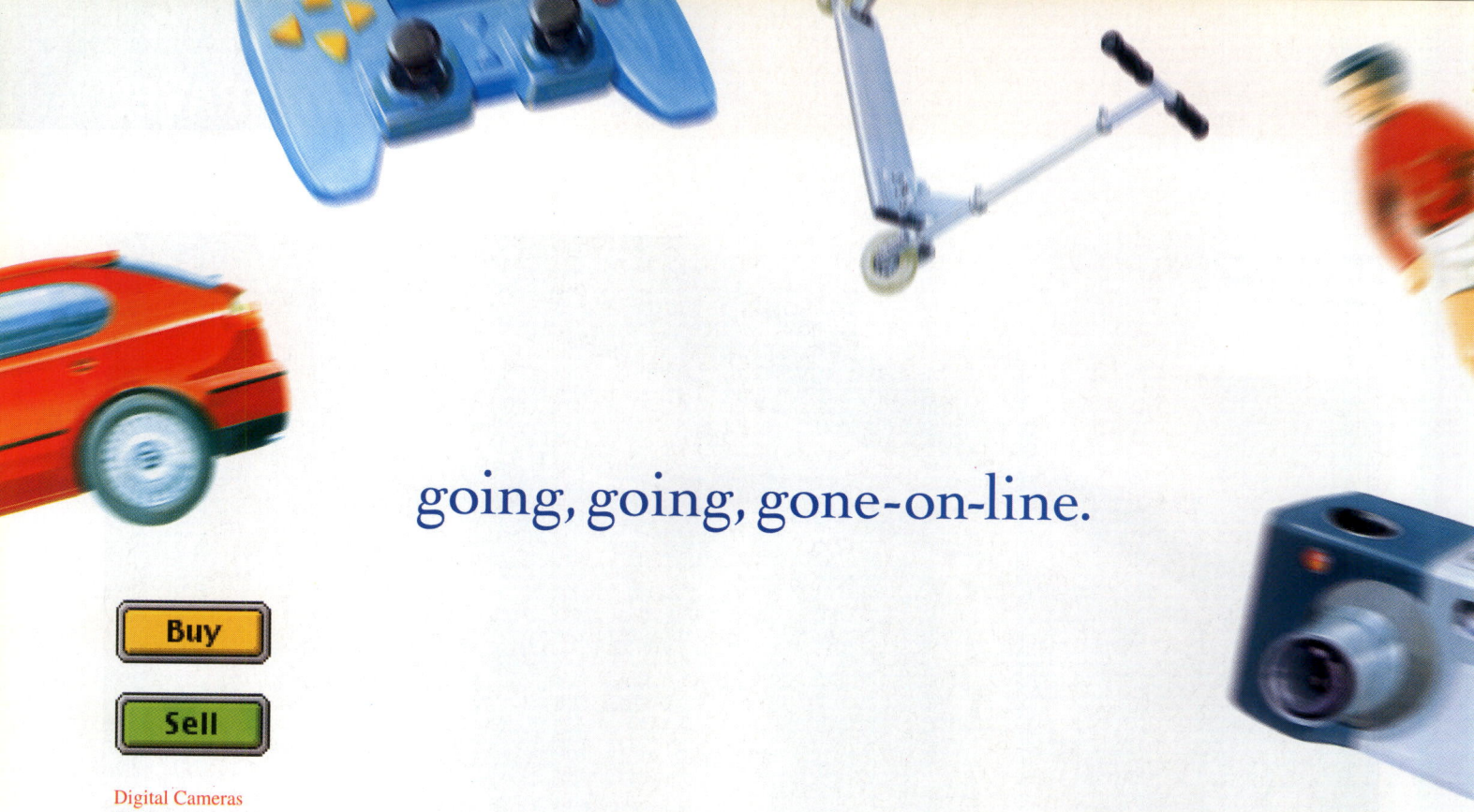
This bright and cheerful site provides nothing in the way of bells and whistles, such as smart search facilities, yet there is something to be said for the ease and efficiency of such a humble design. To find an attraction you need only select a region, such as 'the midlands', and then choose a category. These are pretty broad but, again, it has to be said that getting the facts with the minimum of fuss is just fine, especially if you have already settled on the idea of visiting, say an amusement park, castle or cave. In total over 150 attractions are listed here, each with a basic review, but for anything more detailed than pricing and opening hours you will have to rely on the external links. The addition of a page of long haul air travel reads like a rather poor space filler, but in conclusion, this is one site that should resist the urge to get flash in content and design.

Kids Travel: easy, efficient and effortlessly simple to use

KIDSEVENTS

www.kidsevents.co.uk ★★★★

The 'days out' section of Kids Events is just part of a very impressive looking resource for youngsters and those who care for them at home and school. Editorial and educational content is a big part of the remit here, but the presentation is fun and inviting. As with most sites of this type, an option exists to search for events by area, which turns up a rather mixed bag of results. While an exhibition of 'Surrealism in Birmingham' sounds very fine and improving, one suspects that it is not going to be nearly as popular as 'mums and toddlers get messy' which is listed on the same page. A well thought out site that is clearly working hard to attract and retain an audience, though it did seem to be suffering from a lack of attention when we visited, with a number of events listed under the 'dates for »



going, going, gone-on-line.

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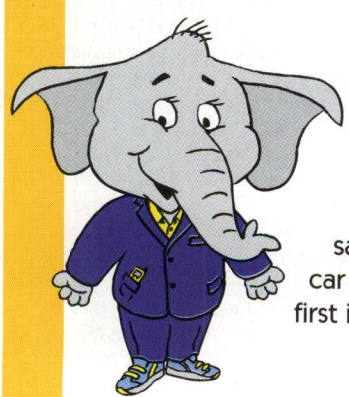

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www.elephant.co.uk

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FOCUS:// Days out <cont>

Funfairs: not for the squeamish

the diary' section apparently having expired up to 10 days previously!

MILITARY AIRSHOWS IN THE UK

home.clara.co.uk/dak2/index.htm

★★★★

Do you love the smell of hotdogs and aviation fuel in the morning? For thousands of people, a visit to an Airshow is equivalent to a religious experience, and while to a large degree this site is aimed at the sort of person who gets misty eyed at the roar of a Spitfire engine, there is ample assistance here for the family in search of a nice, simple noisy day out. To find out where your nearest show is, simply avail yourself of the calendar of events, a no-nonsense list that puts all the key facts at your fingertips, including maps and an essential link out to the BBC weather pages. For those with more than a passing interest the quality of news is clearly of merit, even given the Top Gun backing track, and this is one site that definitely deserves to be called ace.

KidsEvents: mixing fun and info

For some, airshows are almost a religion

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

www.fun-fairs.co.uk/ ★★★★

Created by a lifelong funfair fanatic, this is a loving and extensive work in progress that serves both as a community for fairground professionals and a guide to the numerous events that are held across the country every week. There is a dizzying amount of information here, not all of it especially relevant to the casual day tripper, but the list of events is updated weekly, and the reviews of past fairs may prove useful if you are planning to visit a regularly staged event. On the negative side, though, if the site has a major failing, it is the lack of information regarding which attractions will be featured at specific events. This is something of a shame, as married up with the extensive photographic (and even video) archives that are available on file here you could then be sure of getting to ride the particular attraction of your choice when you turn up.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

TOP ONLINE FLIGHT DEALS

A2bTravel.com
www.a2btravel.com
'Britain's biggest online travel information and booking resource' has flights leaving from across the UK and Ireland.

MyOwnPrice.com
www.myownprice.com
This site asks how much you're prepared to pay and then tries to match it. Very useful.

Deck Chair
www.deckchair.com
Comprehensive flight-finders for worldwide destinations.

Cheap Flights
www.cheapflights.com
Where thrifty surfers go for flights; they also do package holiday and late deals.

DESTINATION INFO

Virgin Net Travel – City Guides
www.virgin.net/travel/cityguides
Provides all the information you'll need for a short break.

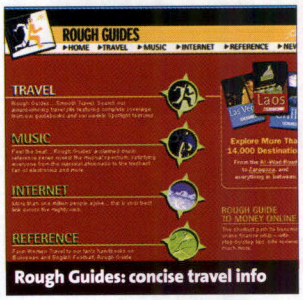
Rough Guides
www.roughguides.com
From the publishers of the well-established guidebooks.

Lonely Planet Online
www.lonelyplanet.com
Let the travel experts guide you around your destination.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Tips 4 Trips
www.tips4trips.com
1,000 handy 'tips for trips'.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office – Travel Advice
www.fco.gov.uk/travel
Get info on countries before setting off.



Rough Guides: concise travel info

The Travel News Organisation
www.travel-news.org
Independent news for travellers.

eTravel.org
www.etravel.org
Travel mag, with plenty of tips.

ACCOMMODATION

Places To Stay
www.placestostay.com
This site will find you a suitable place to rest up.

CottageNet Vacation Rentals
www.cottage-net.ndirect.co.uk
Self-catering database for the UK and Ireland.

Smooth Hound Systems
www.smoothhound.co.uk
Cheap UK B&Bs and hotels.

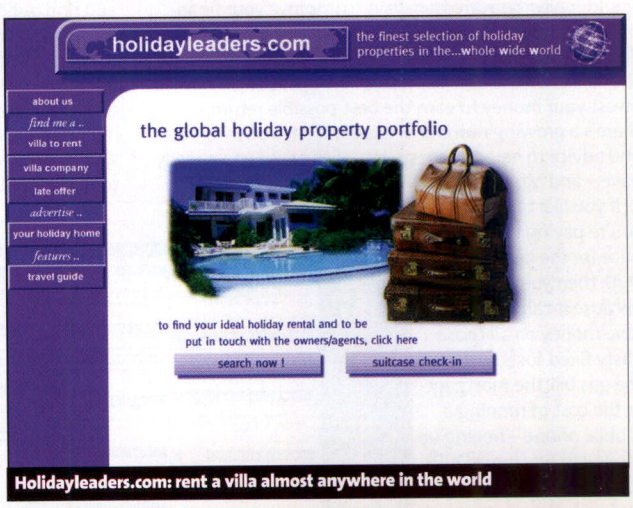
Holidayleaders.com
www.holidayleaders.com
A global directory of villas to rent has plenty of choice.

NEWSGROUP

rec.boats.paddle.touring
Planning a day out at the lake? Then why not pick up some tips here to ensure it's successful?

CHAT ROOM

If your break didn't live up to expectations, vent your spleen at ***HolidayComplaint.com***.



Holidayleaders.com: rent a villa almost anywhere in the world

NEED MORE? **Useful travel addresses** The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Stop wasting money

Make your cash work harder

Use the power of the Web to hunt yourself out a bargain investment or deal

Greek waiters loved Harrods' sale

@ If you have to bookmark one...

MONEYSUPERMARKET

www.moneysupermarket.com ★★★★★

Traditionally there are two ways to improve your financial situation – you can either increase your income or decrease your expenditure. While most financial Web sites focus on the first of these, offering advice on how to invest your money to earn the best possible return, there's a growing number of excellent sites offering tools and advice to help you waste less of the cash you already have – and MoneySupermarket is one of the best.

If you like to make sure you're paying the lowest price for the latest CD or DVD, then you'll love this, because it can help you save money on all those nasty fixed costs such as the gas bill, the mortgage or the cost of running a mobile phone – freeing up money to buy more DVDs. Load up the site and you'll find a nice, clean design, comprising a grid of clearly labelled tools. We tried out the credit cards, too. You have the option of reading a well-written introduction, with everything you need to know about your plastic friends, or going straight into the comparison tool where you can compare your current card against a database of 400 others and find out how much you could save by switching. The form is a cinch: select your credit card from the pull down menu or type in the APR, enter the size of the balance you normally carry over from month to month, and one click will bring up a list of cheaper alternatives with details of how much you could save – it promised to save us £600 over two years, and then offered to take us to the site of the card provider to apply.

Money Supermarket: 'Cleaner to aisle number 22, please...'

All in all, this a well thought-through site, although one of its most impressive features also proved to be its Achilles heel. Most pages have a button labelled 'advice'; click it and you're given the option to chat online with an advisor, but, although we tried on several occasions, there was never anybody at home. Well, you can't have everything.

BUY.CO.UK

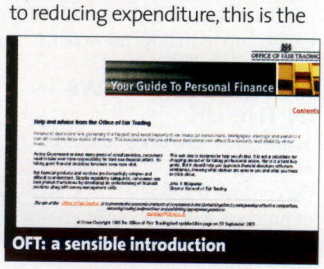
www.buy.co.uk/personal ★★★★

Buy was a close second in the competition for Top Site. It claims to save you an average of £150 a year on utility bills in just 10 minutes and after giving it a test run we're convinced. There's a great bold, accessible design – a clear list of utilities make up the home page, and when you click on the orange and blue Go! sign you jump straight to a simple online form. To find out if you're paying over the odds for gas and electricity you fill in just seven questions; six of them are no-brainers, while the seventh means you have to ferret around for your bills and add up a few numbers, but it's worth it when you click 'View Savings'. You're presented with a list of competitors with the cheapest option clearly flagged. We saved an impressive £60 a year. Hit the blue 'i' for more information on the provider or the blue arrow to apply online or print off forms. A top notch Web site.

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADE PERSONAL FINANCE GUIDE

www.oft.gov.uk/html/finance/index.htm ★★★★

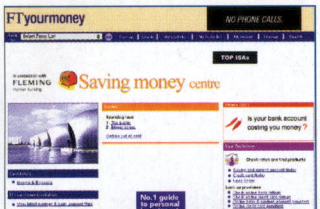
If you need a sensible introduction to reducing expenditure, this is the



OFT: a sensible introduction

place to start. No jazz, just plenty of text on all aspects of personal finance courtesy of the always-helpful Government. Cheers, Gordon. You jump to the various topics by clicking the red-text hyperlinks at the top of the left hand menu, or alternatively you can access a list of contents from the top right of the main screen for a brief description of each heading. The Financial Planning section is the most relevant topic if you're intent on cutting costs. It's basic stuff, but it's all too easy to forget about the basics, and what really makes this site stand out is the clarity and structure of the advice. It takes you by the hand and helps you to identify where all your money goes; afterwards you'll be in a much stronger position to take advantage of the other Web sites on this page. Finally there's a good list of links to other sources of information: Web sites, magazines, TV and radio programmes, and addresses for useful organisations.

WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY; ROBERT JEFFERY ; PICTURES: CORBIS, NEWSMAKERS



FT: well-rounded advice

FT YOUR MONEY SAVING MONEY CENTRE

www.ftyourmoney.com/guides/saving/saving_gateway.html ★★★★

It doesn't take a degree in economics to realise that any FT site will probably have some sound financial advice, but the main site is so huge and sprawling that it's not always obvious where to go for the information you're looking for – hence the lengthy URL. We gave the Saving Money Centre a test drive and weren't disappointed. The main page is packed with adverts and links galore, but you should focus on the guides in the centre of the screen because they'll take you to one of the best budgeting features on the Web. First read the guide to spending less where, if you've registered, you can save 'to dos' to your personal list, then fill in the Income and Expense Calculator to find out where all your money's going. But the reason we like the site so much is the final stage of the guide, 'My Saving Money Plan': you're presented with the results of your Income and Expense alongside the latest news about credit cards deals, cheap mortgages and so on, and a list of links to relevant comparison sites so you can start reducing your expenditure in several categories right away.

MONEYEXTRA

www.moneyextra.com ★★★

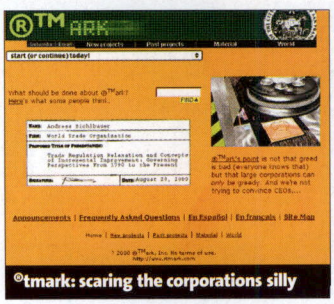
There's so much on offer on the home page, you could be forgiven for being a bit disorientated at the outset, but a busy design seems to be the norm for financial sites these days, with links to the same features presented in several different formats – banners, boxes, buttons and menus. We were interested in the box of comparison tools that sits at the bottom of each page. The mortgage comparison calculator appeared easy and quick to use, and after three pages of questions about your current mortgage you have the option to go straight to quotes or to continue entering more information about your own financial circumstances. But disastrously, after five minutes of typing it returned the message: 'Sorry, service not available at the present time.' Nobody expects Web sites to work perfectly all the time, but it would have been less frustrating if »

LINKS ;-) CULTURE JAMMING

Death to the dot coms

At first glance, ***www.rtmark.com*** certainly doesn't appear to be a hotbed of global anti-capitalist activism. In fact, its home page resembles nothing more exciting than an everyday investment bank, advertising 'Corporate Consulting For The 21st Century.'

In reality, however, this is one site your bank manager certainly won't be browsing in his lunch hour: ®tmark is one of a growing band of dot coms created as a direct response to the increasing commercialisation of the Web, a phenomenon which has seen liberal-minded young Americans switching off computers in their droves.



®tmark: scaring the corporations silly

While few doubted the Internet would, eventually, become a magnet for the corporations, a hardcore of activist surfers have reacted with carefully-crafted indignation to such developments, building an ever-expanding network of like-minded individuals. These aren't your brick-in-hand-dog-on-string-style activists: on the contrary, such Web subversives are actively employing the same tactics as their enemy in order to achieve their aims.

What ®tmark offers, according to its well-crafted FAQ page, is 'mutual funds' benefiting from 'limited liability.' So far, so Abbey National. The reality, however, is quite different: the site keeps an ongoing list of 'projects' which require funding, manpower or both. These generally involve the (legal) infiltration of corporations to undermine their authority and profits.

It works, too. When eToys threatened similar-sounding art site eToy.com with court action over their domain name, an ®tmark appeal to boycott the toy retailer and buy up shares had a significant effect on their share price. They were also behind the widely-publicised 'Phone In Sick Day' last year, as they protested against 'the erosion of leisure time.'

While the World Trade Organisation aren't yet on their knees as a result of such pranks, there's growing evidence that the Web's original free-to-all ethos is being vigorously pursued by a number of underground organisations. Such activists like to call themselves 'culture jammers,' throwing a spanner into consumerism's works. Adbusters (***www.adbusters.org***) is a perfect example – one of its major strategies is to fund magazine and newspaper 'subvertisements' to counteract what they believe to be misleading messages from corporations.

They produce posters with messages like 'You can't email bread'

And then there are the more frivolous campaigns, like ***www.blowthedotoutyourass.com***, which highlights the ridiculousness of governments funding Net connections in the Third World by producing posters with messages like 'But You Can't Email Bread As Attachments' and 'You Can't Stream Running Water.' Droplift (***www.droplift.org***) protests against the range of music available in stores by 'smuggling' downloadable CDs of experimental tracks onto shelves.

If it all sounds a bit childish, that's because it frequently is, but it's difficult not to raise a smile at the irony of the ultimate corporate communication tool being used as an agent of anarchy. Until, of course, it's your company that gets it in the neck...

The fuzz caught up with Ronald...

WANT TO KNOW MORE CALL 020 8307 2300

FOCUS:// Stop wasting money <cont>

the message had appeared before we had typed in our details. One redeeming feature is the Guides written by experts, including one on how to lower your tax bill.

THIS IS MONEY

www.thisismoney.com ★★★

Part of the 'This is...' stable of sites from Associated Media, this one impresses with its no-nonsense consumer fact files offering stacks of info on how to make sure you're getting the best deal from mortgage providers and insurers. We particularly liked the enlightening article on extended warranties – read it and you'll never let a spotty sales assistant talk you into wasting money on another warranty ever again. From the blue menu bars on the left hand side of the screen you can also access a feature headed 'Paperwork in Plain English' where you can find explanations of official documents such as what a PAYE Coding Notice is when it's at home. There's not much there at the moment, which might explain why the link is hidden away in tiny print, but we'd like to see more made of this. There are also some handy financial calculators, but all in all this is a fairly humdrum site and you get the sense that the 'This is...' team are often going through the motions.

Moneygator: glossary of terms

It offered a deal of £100 more than we pay now

MONEYGATOR

www.moneygator.com ★★★

If you want to fork out less for the necessities, you need to understand what you're buying and a good way to do that is to spend 20 minutes at moneygator. Design and navigation are both simple and obviously well thought through. No clutter, just links to several product categories such as mortgages and insurance, and each category is divided into 'Understand' pages and 'Compare' pages. The first takes you step by step through all the factors you should be thinking about when buying, say, a mortgage, the second allows you to put that knowledge into action and find the best deal. For mortgages, it takes just a couple of minutes to fill in a straightforward form broken into three quick stages before you get a list of lenders who meet your criteria and the option to apply online. Another nice feature is the glossary of technical terms lenders use to bamboozle you, so if you don't know what an MIG is, you'd better check it out.

VIRGIN MONEY

www.virginmoney.com ★★★

Would it live up to all the recent hype and advertising claims? As might be expected the design is bright and arresting based on icons of blue, green and orange stick men. To navigate click on one of these and the blue man takes you to 'I need to sort out my finances where do I start?'. There you can read advice on how to stop haemorrhaging money and set targets with the goals calculator. The little orange man takes you to primers on various products, and if your car insurance is up for renewal be sure to read the tips on how to keep your premiums down. And the little green man on roller skates? There you'll find the comparison tools, but they don't perform as well as might be hoped. First you have to register to use them, then spend 10 minutes looking up and filling in your details, only to be presented with a series of statements you have to tick, and so on, as the search engine gathers the facts by a process of elimination. After all that, it offered us insurance costing over £100 more than we were already paying.

WHICH? MONEY

www.which.net/money/contents.html ★★★

Okay, here's where you might have to fork out some money to find out how to save money. Accessing the Which? reports online costs £7.75 month, and with so much free information available, is it worth it? We think so, but you can find out for yourself by checking out the regular free reports or taking up the 30 day trial offer. Once you've registered for the trial bring up one of the 100+ reports by choosing one from the grey scroll box in the centre of the screen, or click on 'archive' for ones going back to 1996. They cover every aspect of money management: spending it, investing it, saving it, and a few dealing with cutting costs. Unfortunately there are only titles and no descriptions so often it's a question of trial and error to find the best reports.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Keep abreast of what's going on in the world of finance with Citywire.co.uk

INVESTING

Citywire.co.uk
www.citywire.co.uk
Company news and advice.

The Motley Fool UK
www.fool.co.uk
One of *thenet*'s favourite sites, offering helpful advice for the learner investor.

Ask Figaro
www.askfigaro.com
Compare financial products' results here.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Investment Week
www.invweek.co.uk
Monetary advice from the in-depth *Investment Week*.

eye4money
www.eye4money.com
UK and US financial information – plus a share simulation game.

hemscott.NET
www.hemscott.com
Get access to a veritable goldmine of analysis from this easy-to-use, no-nonsense site.

MONEY NEWS AND SHARE PRICES

FT.com
www.ft.com
The mother of all money sites, from the makers of the financial bible.

Bloomberg.com UK
www.bloomberg.co.uk
Up-to-date data for the professional investor.

Sharepages.com
www.sharepages.com
News from all the markets in a quick-glance, easy-to-navigate format.

SHARE TRADING

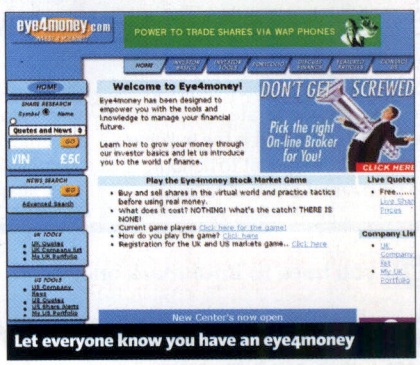
Stocktrade
www.stocktrade.co.uk
Keep your finger on the pulse with this site, which offers real-time prices.

Barclays Stockbrokers
www.barclays-stockbrokers.co.uk
Real-time share dealing from one of the biggest names in banking.

Forex-CMC
www.forex-cmc.co.uk
The first online foreign-exchange dealer.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Interactive Investor International
www.iii.co.uk
Advice for individual investors.



Let everyone know you have an eye4money

Money Unlimited
www.moneyunlimited.co.uk
Sound financial advice from *The Guardian*.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

UK finance
uk.finance
Advice on a variety of topics.

CHAT ROOM

Investor MSN
investor.msn.com
Chat with other finance fans.

NEED MORE? This month's bargains Dealfinder p28
Useful money addresses The Directory p86

FOCUS:// No Smoking Day

Give up, don't give in

It's No Smoking Day on 14 March and if you're looking for help to kick the weed, the Net is there for you

NO SMOKING DAY

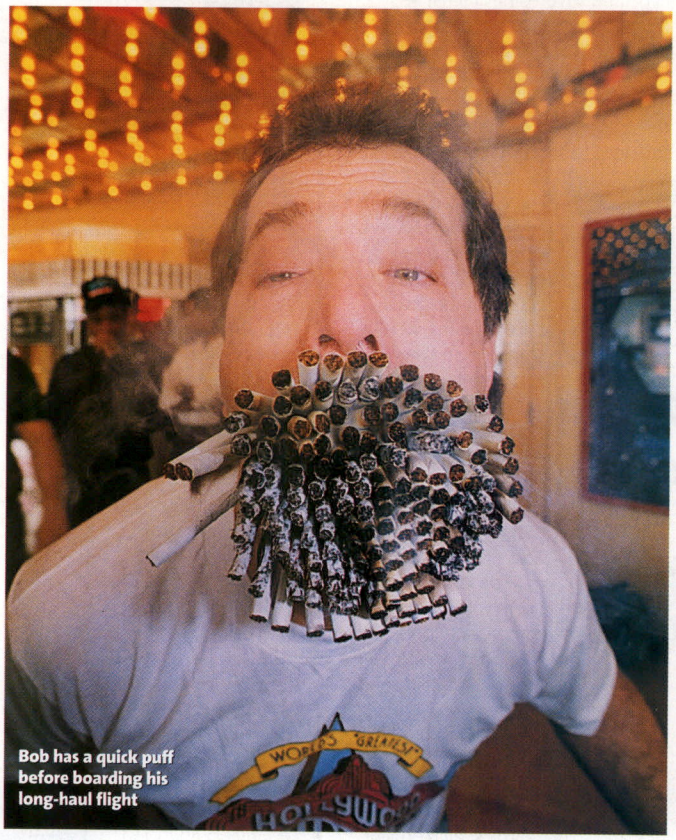
www.nosmokingday.org.uk ★★★★

As *the net* went to press, the official No Smoking Day site was being overhauled in preparation for this year's event. It's designed to be as interactive as possible, so local organisers can download resource packs (games, quizzes, factsheets), materials and even guides for dentists, teachers and students. There will also be sections for individual smokers with tips, advice and information on NRT products and Zyban, the exciting new non-nicotine prescription remedy. The sections of the site we saw, and the advance information we got from the Webmasters, mark out the site as one worth visiting when it goes live in time for the day itself (14 March).

THE TRUTH

thetruth.com ★★★★★

Many quit sites are a trifle over-earnest, which doesn't help their cool quotient. But the generation of Mark Thomas and Michael Moore puts arguments forward with much more class and style, and The Truth does it superbly. As the cleverly-designed front page puts it, 'The last 5 generations weren't smart enough to see through big tobacco's deception. Are we?'. The basic premise of the site is anti-corporate, and one of the stunts carried out is the building of a Tobacco Memorial 'to honour the 1200 Americans that tobacco kills every day'. There's also a wealth of information on the history of tobacco, and disturbing images in the Smoker's Body section. Not your average no-smoking site, and perhaps all the better for it.



Bob has a quick puff before boarding his long-haul flight

ASH

www.ash.org.uk ★★★★★

The Web site for anti-nicotine standard-bearers Action on Smoking and Health makes the group's stance quite clear: 'We don't condemn smoking or attack smokers – but we do challenge the PR and deceitful propaganda of the tobacco industry.' This includes detailing how ammonia is added to some cigs to make them more addictive and striving to ban tobacco advertising, sponsorship and promotion. When we visited the site there was palpable excitement about the progress of the UK Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill through the Houses of Parliament, along with a none-too-subtle dig at 'flat-earth Tories ignore the evidence and press for more death and disease'. As you might detect there's a lack of humour about the site but, besides the mountain of anti-industry information and links, there's a wealth of help for those wishing to give up. The 15 tips outline the advantages, physical and fiscal, of giving up and offers a freephone helpline for advice, while a condensed pile of medical research illustrates just how soon you'll feel the benefits of kicking the weed.

ALLEN CARR

www.allencarrseasyway.com/ ★★★★

A former 100-per-day chainsmoker, Allen Carr has numerous devotees for his 'Easyway to Stop Smoking' clinics and techniques. This is borne out by the testimonies of Ruby Wax, Sir Richard Branson and Sir Anthony Hopkins on this audio-based, Flash-heavy site. He's sold three million books in 20 languages and has clinics in 18 countries and now offers an online course through this site. As you might expect it's not free – you have to pay £6.99 for the full course – but there's a free introduction which gives you a good idea of the type of tutelage you'd be paying for.

The site gives you 20 questions ('Does smoking help you relax?', 'Is it necessary to suffer withdrawal pangs?') and asks you to guess what most smokers believe the answers to be. It's an intriguing premise that draws in the potential quitter – even if it's easy to baulk at the claim that it's 'a journey of discovery so fascinating it will make even the most interesting cases of Sherlock Holmes appear to be positively mundane'.

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: REX, BBC

@ If you have to bookmark one...

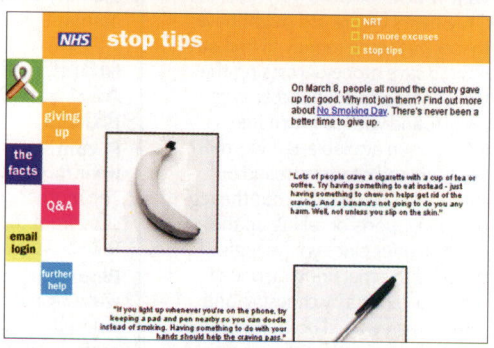
SMOKING: DON'T GIVE UP GIVING UP

www.givingupsmoking.co.uk ★★★★★

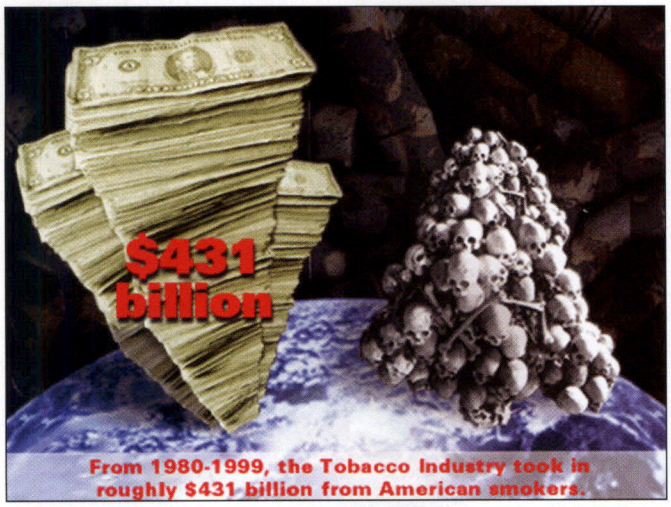
The Health Education Authority's site is a font of practical help for those hoping to kick the dreaded weed. Some of the advice is quite obvious but well worth repeating – like subtly changing your routine, so if you have a tab with a cuppa then have orange juice instead.

Taking it step by step, the site advises potential quitters on how to plan for the big day, with action plans on how to give up for life. Even if, as they stress, you should take it one day at a time.

One of the methods the site suggests for giving up is Nicotine Replacement Therapy – patches, gum, tablets, inhalators and sprays – which, apparently, doubles your chances of succeeding. Many find it helps them break the psychological habit, the site explains, the pointof having something in the hand – and once that's gone, the theory goes, it's then easier to break the cravings.



The 'Passion Killer' section warns lovers that 60 per cent of men and 80 per cent of women joining Dateline last year specified non-smokers, while the Facts section reminds the reader that 10,000 people die in the UK each month from smoking. Hardly surprising, given the 4,000 chemicals in cigs – 43 of which are known to induce cancer.



From 1980-1999, the Tobacco Industry took in roughly $431 billion from American smokers.

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY

www.worldnotobaccoday.com

★★★★

Not the British No Smoking Day, but a similar US effort sponsored by the World Health Organisation (***www.who.org***) held every year since 1988 on 31 May. Includes a No Tobacc'O'Meter which will calculate just how much money you've saved since you gave up, and, ghoulishly, tells you how many days you've added to your life by giving up. If you haven't yet got as far as kicking the habit you can sign an online pledge ('I want to have whiter teeth', etc), and there's a raft of testimonials from previous habit-kickers. Or if you want to help someone else give up, send them an animated e-card. One of the site's best features is the section for the worried parents of potential smokers, which doles out hints and tips without unnecessary preaching, but overall the site loses marks for the lack of practical advice for those going through withdrawals; what you need when you're climbing the walls is constructive advice, not platitudes for those who've already managed it.

QUIT

www.quit.org.uk ★★★★★

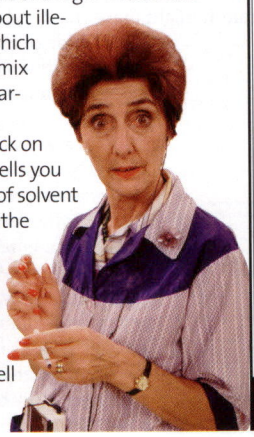
QUIT is a UK charity helping people to give up, and they lay claim to the longest-established smoking helpline in the world. (The helpline operates in English, Bengali, Urdu, Gujerati, Hindi, Turkish and Kurdish too, so there's no excuse.) However, it's the strength of the content that earns the plaudits here. Neatly laid out in soothing dark blues on whites, the site simply and clearly explains the reasons for – and the methods of – giving up tobacco. So far so good, but what marks QUIT out is the facility to print out charts, plans and smoker's diaries to help you get over the weed. The diary helps pinpoint when you smoke and why, the chart lets you assess the pros and cons of smoking and there's space to paste on a photo of a loved one as an added incentive.

BBC HEALTH: KICK THE HABIT

www.bbc.co.uk/health/kth/index.shtml ★★★★★

Dale Winton was a 40-a-day man until he had his final fag while hosting this BBC show about all manner of addictions, and the accompanying Web site is as in-depth as we've come to expect from the Beeb. A series of pop-up Flash windows entertain and inform, like the Climb & Slide game, which neatly illustrates the pitfalls and benefits of giving up. A Habit Kicker questionnaire lets you test the size of your habit, although even if you choose the hardcore answers it still prefers to lecture 'could do better' rather than screaming. And a Body Tour illustrates the harmful effects of all those bad things you do to yourself in the pursuit of a high. There's also a section about illegal drugs which appears to mix advice on narcotics (for instance, click on LSD and it tells you the effects of solvent abuse). But the site's comprehensive info and lengthy list of links makes it well worth a look.

Paste on a photo of a loved one for added incentive



@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

ONLINE DIAGNOSES

InteliHealth
www.intelihealth.com
A full and frank site to help solve problems. Also includes up-to-date health news and an email newsletter service.

MayoClinic.com
www.mayoclinic.com
Features a personalised health planner, online weight-loss programme and news briefs.

Quackwatch
www.quackwatch.com
As a member of the Consumer Federation of America, this site endeavours to combat health-related frauds while encouraging visitors to make sound choices.

DIETING SITES

BigSisters
www.bigsisters.co.uk
Find inspiration on this site, where six British women are endeavouring to lose a combined 20 stone before July 2001.

Prevention
www.healthyideas.com
Online women's magazine, featuring recipes and fitness tips.

3 Fat Chicks on a Diet!
www.3fatchicks.com
Find motivation through the success stories of three formerly overweight sisters. Includes recipe and exercise ideas.

WeightWatchers.com
uk.weightwatchers.com
Helps you lose weight with a 'point system'; also includes recipe ideas.

PREGNANCY

Mother and Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Features shopping, chat and a dads' zone – oh, and a video of a water birth, if you really want to see such a thing.

The Baby Register
www.thebabyregistry.co.uk
Share tips and advice with other mothers and fathers.

OFFICIAL HEALTH SITES

NHS Direct
www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/direct.htm
Get help from the NHS 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

BMA Online
www.bma.org.uk
Provides information on how to become a doctor or nurse.

British Dental Health Foundation
www.dentalhealth.org.uk
Get your dentistry queries answered online.

NEWSGROUP

alt.support.stop-smoking
Kick the habit with others.

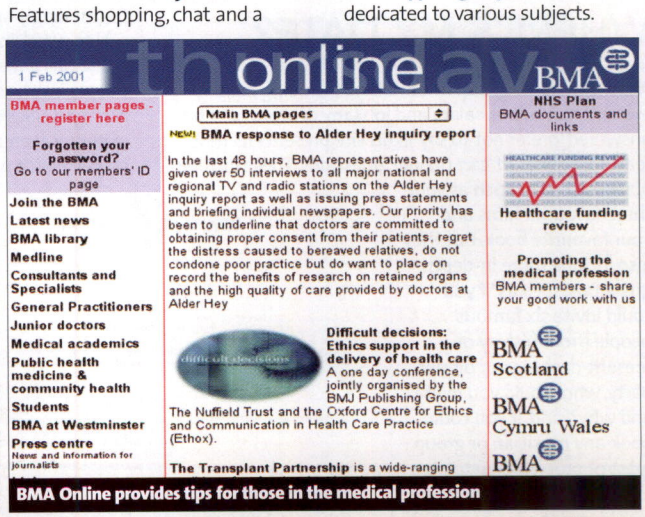
MAILING LIST

Join a support group for people who want to quit by sending an email marked 'info smokefree' to ***Majordomo@List-Server.net***.

British Dental Health: informative

CHAT ROOM

www.support-group.com Chat dedicated to various subjects.



BMA Online provides tips for those in the medical profession

NEED MORE? Useful health addresses The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Dating

Jack Sprat and his missus: proof that opposites do attract

Looking for someone?

Was this Valentine's too lonely for your liking? Then find a friend online with Web-based dating agencies

FRIEND FINDER

www.friendfinder.com ★★★★

As soon as you log on to Friend Finder (motto: 'Meet your special someone') you get the impression that it's a professional site. The initial pages provide clearly marked links to different sections without much hassle. There are a number of sister sites as well, such as dating services specifically for senior citizens and churchgoers.

The search options are standard, but one feature you don't find on most sites is the opportunity to key in the languages you speak, so you can meet non-English-speaking companions. You can also search for a possible match within 20km of your postcode, avoiding responses that are too far away to be practical.

Membership is free, but to take advantage of most of the services (including responding to someone who matches your needs) you have to sign up and pay a variable fee. Using the free service, we got five matches a week that we could reply to, but they were not restricted to our immediate area.

LOVEFINDER UK

www.lovefinder.co.uk ★★★★

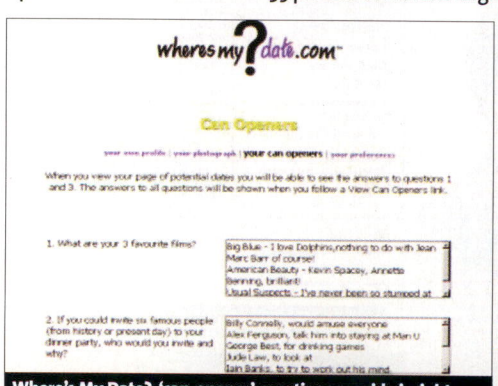
This site covers the whole of the British Isles, and you can select a region from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland. The sign-up procedure is standard, although you are given the option to have an email sent to you every time a possible match from your town submits their information. Considering the amount of singles in a city as large as London, this would almost certainly clog up our inbox, and we chose not to do it. But for smaller towns this could be invaluable. You can also submit a voice or video advert to accompany your profile. The site claims to accept all common formats of

@ If you have to bookmark one...

WHERE'S MY DATE?

www.wheresmydate.com ★★★★★

After the usual sign-up information, including height, eye and hair colour, salary and job (any of which can be answered 'prefer not to say'), this site presents its best feature; a series of 'can-opener' questions. These include obvious choices such as your three favourite films and your favourite book. But they also include more in-depth questions, such as 'if you could invite six famous people (from history or present-day) to your dinner party, who would you invite and why?' and 'If you could book any musician or group (past or present-day) to play at your birthday party, who would you choose and why?' Be careful, though: if you're on a dial-up connection it's best to make a note of the questions and write your answers offline, or you could find yourself running up a frighteningly large bill.



Where's My Date?: 'can-opener' questions provide insight

Not surprisingly, looking at the answers to these questions gave us more insight into the personalities of people involved than a hundred descriptions with the acronym GSOH. Our efforts produced a list of 21 names in our local area, all of whom matched our conditions by 95 percent or more. It might make the standard subscription of £14.95 per month worthwhile... maybe money *can* buy you love.

And don't worry if you are stuck for a witty (or truthful) answer; you can change any of the details you've written (including the can-openers) when you re-enter the site.

So if you spent Valentine's night channel-swapping with a soup-for-one, asking yourself 'where's my date?', try to make sure next year's a different story by logging on to this cyber-matchmaker.

WORDS: MATT CHAPMAN; ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: KOBAL, FRANK BARRETT/NEWSGROUP; ILLUSTRATION: DAVID SEMPLE

audio or video, as long as the file size is less than 10Mb.

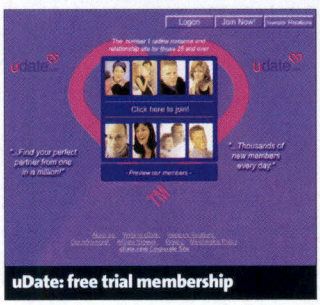
As ever, to reply to an advert you will need to become a member. Postal applications cost just £10 for three months or £20 for one year. The search facilities brought up almost 300 matches based on our town and a set age range.

UDATE.COM

www.udate.com ★★★★

uDate takes the same route as many of the services on offer here, giving you a free trial membership that allows you to post your details but not contact other members. To convert to full membership costs from £5.95 for five days to £69.95 per year. The five-day membership permits you to see if you like the site when you have access to all its controls; something other sites would do well to implement.

The matching system is pretty comprehensive, too: there are options to do a two-way match to see if you meet your prospective partners' requirements in addition to them meeting yours. You can also start chatting immediately



uDate: free trial membership

to members who are logged on to the site. Our regular search, which we tried on all the sites reviewed, brought up 192 matches, but most of the people way down the list only matched a few items.

UK SINGLES

www.uksingles.co.uk ★★★★

UK Singles has a unique selling point: unlike most of the other dating sites out there it recognises that you might be single but not looking for love as such, but rather people who share your interests. The site aims to help widowed and divorced people to rebuild their social lives, and people in new towns to find accommodation and clubs. There are even listings for singles looking for like-minded friends to go on holiday with. However, not wanting to take itself out of the market altogether, there is also a personals section. Unlike the majority of other sites here, UK Singles is completely free to post and reply to messages. For dating purposes, however, the site was disappointing, and we only scored three possible partners. »

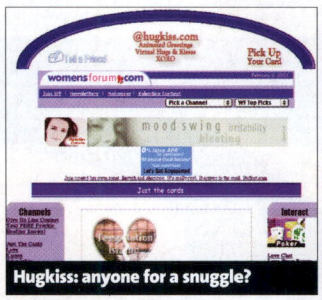
LINKS ;-) ONLINE HUGGING

Cybercuddles all round

So you've just finished a furious round of online fragging before checking the latest developments on Eminem's home page, pausing to vent your anger at ***www.mybosssucks.com***. Where next?

How about calming it down a bit? For, while the Net is a hotbed of hate much of the time, there are little fluffy-bunny corners of niceness that'll reduce even the most hardened Cradle Of Filth fan to an emotional wreck.

One of the most sickeningly sweet Web trends is online hugging. Maybe it's a reaction to the gradual commercialisation of the Web, or the increasing isolation heavy surfers find themselves suffering. One thing is clear; with over 100 cuddling sites out there, online hugging is a booming business.



Hugkiss: anyone for a snuggle?

With over 100 sites out there, online hugging is big business

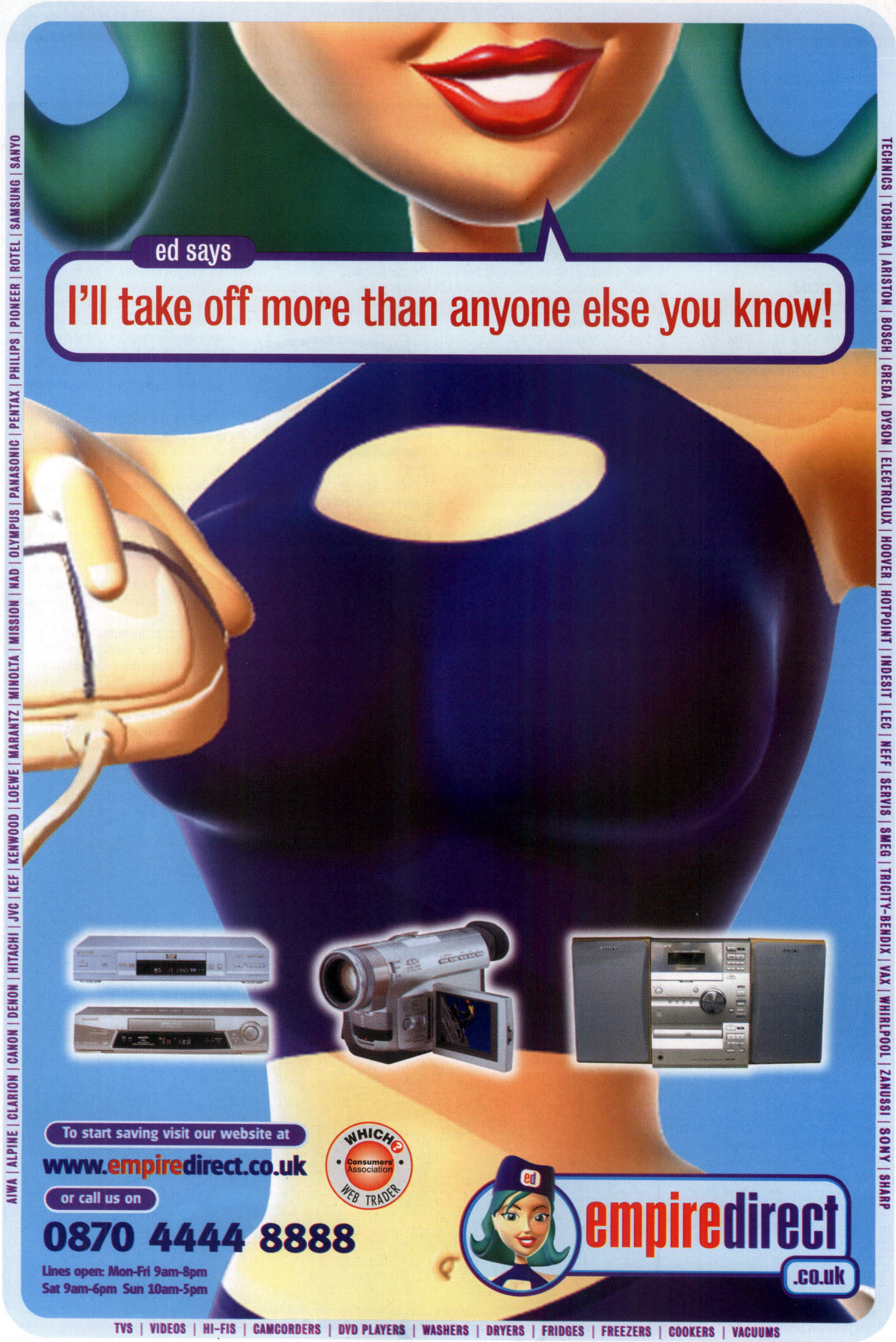
People apparently turn to Web huggery for a number of reasons. Some are lacking affection in their everyday lives. Some see it as safer than a full-blown cyber affair. Others just want to share their happiness with the rest of the world.

They meet in hugging portals like The Hugging Site (***members.tripod.com/~hugging***), which explains the ins-and-outs of cuddling, its history, and methods, which evidently include the 'hampburger-hug' and the enticing-sounding 'offensive hug'. The site also acts as a forum for users to post 'hugging stories' detailing their most significant or moving hugs.

And there's more: just in case your technique isn't up to scratch, you can always bone up with the help of William Cane's *The Art Of Hugging*, available for a very reasonable $7 through ***www.kissing.com/hug.html***. Or perhaps you'd like to participate in this July's Net-organised World Hug Week (***oac3.hsc.uth.tmc.edu/~bardoin/hugs***), in which you'll be encouraged to hug three people a day, preferably strangers. Try that on a night out in Newcastle and see what happens.

But what if you're too isolated for physical contact? Predictably, that's where the Web comes into its own. Sir Isle's Links To Cuddly Places (***members.nbci.com/sir_isle/cuddlink.htm***) is jam-packed with people who'd just love to embrace fellow surfers – virtually, of course. Among them are Giorgio (***www.angelfire.com/fl/BODYLIFE/giorgio5.html***), who has been visited by over half a million people since he first opened his arms to the world.

Inevitably, the humble hug has fallen foul of the money men. There are now numerous sites that make it their business to offer virtual hugs and 'hugging cards'. The overbearing ***www.hugkiss.com*** even invites you to dispatch 'Hugs, Cuddles and Snuggles', in the form of frankly nauseating animations. The world of online embracing can only remain pure and unsullied for so long when there's hard cash to be made. Still, as Giorgio says, 'we all need a hug sometimes'. Does anyone know if they still sell guns on eBay?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TECHNICS | TOSHIBA | ARISTON | BOSCH | CREDA | DYSON | ELECTROLUX | HOOVER | HOTPOINT | INDESIT | LEC | NEFF | SERVIS | SMEG | TRICITY-BENDIX | VAX | WHIRLPOOL | ZANUSSI | SONY | SHARP
TVS | VIDEOS | HI-FIS | CAMCORDERS | DVD PLAYERS | WASHERS | DRYERS | FRIDGES | FREEZERS | COOKERS | VACUUMS

FOCUS:// Dating <cont>

THE SWITCH

www.theswitch.co.uk ★★★★

The Switch allows you to sign up online in much the same way as other dating services, but also permits you to sign up over the phone. You can then use the phone to access the same services – the system will deliver messages to you using text-to-speech technology and vice versa.

This flexibility almost scooped The Switch top spot in our survey, but we encountered many problems with the site. For starters we had trouble logging on, with the error message telling us we had supplied the wrong log-in details before we had even finished registering. The information you do provide about yourself is also too regimented: at one point you are asked to choose your favourite film, but are given a menu of less than 200 from which to choose.

Parts of the site could also do with a data spring-clean. For example, the area code options to use the phone service still lists London with its old 0171 and 0181 codes. All in all, a great idea, but poorly executed.

Billie: too young to know better

UK Singles aims to help widows and divorcees

DATELINE

www.dateline.uk.com ★★★★

Dateline is typical of the dating services available online. Getting set up is quick; and once you have filled in the initial details, your password to log on to the members' area is emailed to you. Once there you can browse the database and make changes to your record.

When inputting your personal details you can't leave anything blank, however, so you have to state your politics and religion, although the information won't be passed to a prospective date without your permission. On the initial set up, the details you need to give about your ideal partner are also strict, such as a minimum required height. None of the boxes has a generic choice, like 'any height', but there are more options once you've registered.

Our search turned up 10 prospective partners living within 15 miles of our address who were compatible with our preferences. At £99 for membership, this is one of the more expensive services.

ELITE DATING UK

www.elite-dating.co.uk ★★★★

Heterosexuality is the word at Elite, and this site is only for men seeking women and vice versa. The service is easy to use, and every message you receive includes a link to that member's profile. This allows you to quickly read their details and reply with a single click.

This service provided us with a large amount of replies based on our preferences, but the areas were not well defined. And while it is possible to sort replies by clicking on the blue Area link, this still only lists them generically, so we were left with 23 people in the South and 34 in the South East. Areas are also sorted alphabetically, so if you are looking for someone in the South east (as we were) you'll have to go through 10 or 12 pages of dates from other parts of the country.

The price is right, though, with a six-month subscription costing £15 and a two-month subscription curiously costing £20.

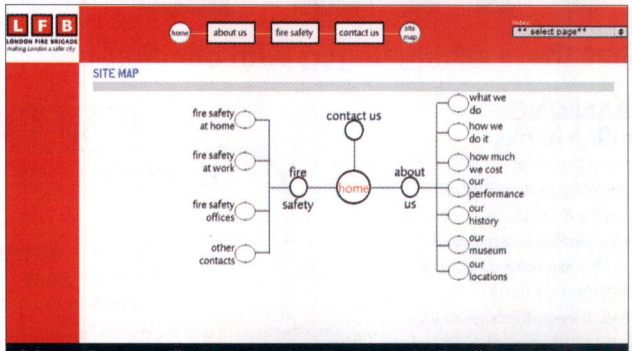
DATING DANGERS

If you believe the scare stories in the media, meeting someone over the Internet is a bad idea and you are putting yourself at risk. But if you follow some simple rules there is no reason you can't feel safe on your date.

- Arrange to meet in a public place. Do not invite someone to your home, or meet at their home, on a first date.
- **Don't accept a lift to or from the date. Make your own way there and back, ensuring that you have the money for public transport and/or taxis and know the times of trains or buses.**
- Let someone know where you are going, who you are meeting (you don't have to tell them you met through an agency), and what time you expect to be home.
- **If you have a mobile phone, take it with you.**

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



If the spark causes a flame contact the LFB, at *www.london-fire.gov.uk*

GOVERNMENT

10 Downing Street
www.number-10.gov.uk
Features the latest news and facts, and an opportunity to join a discussion forum. Don't miss the Webcam, which offers panoramic views of Downing Street.

Department of Health Website
www.doh.gov.uk
Read up on the Department's policies; also provides links to the latest health-related reports.

Scottish Parliament
www.thebabyregistry.co.uk
Up-to-the-minute news bulletins, and a chance to share your views .

National Assembly for Wales
www.wales.gov.uk
Features news, press releases, the latest policies, and links to other Welsh offices.

ROYALTY

The British Monarchy
www.royal.gov.uk
Find news on the royals past and present, photos and tour info.

The Royal Archive
royalarchive.com
Features news, biogs and a shop.

The Prince of Wales
www.princeofwales.gov.uk
News, galleries and a database of HRH's speeches.

Royal Families of the World
www.royalfamily.com
Provides links to both official and unofficial sites of monarchies all over the world.

RELIGION

Church Net UK
www.churchnet.org.uk
Database for Christian affairs in the UK and beyond. Includes news and comprehensive church and groups listings.

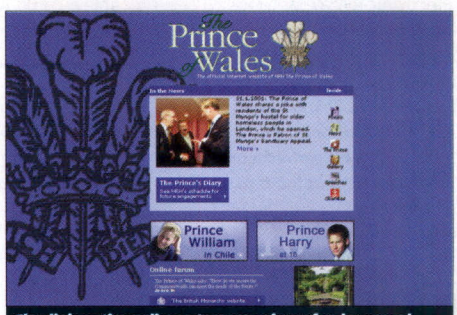
The Buddhist Society UK
www.buddsoc.org.uk
Features major Buddhist schools and traditions, and a list of books and courses.

Jewish.net
www.jewish.net
'The number one European destination for all things Jewish.'

Islam Direct
www.islamdirect.com
News, teachings and links to Muslim sites on the Web.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

London Fire Brigade
www.london-fire.gov.uk
With safety tips and photos.



Charlie's antics online, at *www.princeofwales.gov.uk*

Police
www.policecouldyou.co.uk
Recruitment site, with local links.

NEWSGROUP

soc.singles
Chat with single folk, or learn tips from others who've used dating services. Alternatively, natter about whatever takes your fancy

MAILING LIST

Find others on the prowl: send an email marked 'info socialgroup' to ***socialgroup@yahoo.com***.

NEED MORE? **Hundreds of addresses** The Directory p86

The Directory

Save those aching fingers with our digit-friendly guide to all the most essential sites in cyberspace

<BANKING>
Online banks
Abbey National
www.abbeynational.co.uk
Alliance & Leicester
www.alliance-leicester.co.uk
Barclays ***www.barclays.co.uk***
Co-operative Bank
www.co-operativebank.co.uk
Direct Line ***www.directline.com***
Egg ***www.egg.co.uk***
First Direct ***www.firstdirect.co.uk***
First-e ***www.first-e.com***
Halifax ***www.halifax-online.co.uk***
HSBC ***www.banking.hsbc.co.uk***
Lloyds TSB ***www.lloydstsb.co.uk***
Nationwide
www.nationwide.co.uk
Natwest ***www.natwest.com***
Royal Bank Of Scotland
www.royalbankscot.co.uk
Smile ***www.smile.co.uk***
Virgin Direct
www.virgin-direct.co.uk

<CLASSIFIEDS>
Ad-Mart ***www.ad-mart.co.uk***
Economist Classifieds Market Place
www.classified.economist.com
Eureka-net ***www.eureka-net.co.uk***
Free Classified
www.freeclassified.co.uk
itsbazaar.com ***www.itsbazaar.com***
JJ Electronic Plaza Classifieds
www.jjplaza.com/onlinead
Localads ***www.localads.net***
London's Classifieds
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LOOT ***www.loot.com***
netTRADER ***www.nettrader.co.uk***
PhotoAds ***www.photoads.co.uk***
Reel Exchange
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Sellitnet ***www.sellitnet.com***

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Shareware ***www.download.com***
Shockwave ***www.shockwave.com***
ZDNet ***www.hotfiles.com***

<ENCYCLOPEDIAS>
Encarta ***encarta.msn.com***
Encyclopedia Britannica
www.britannica.com
Encyclopedia.com
www.encyclopedia.com

LIFESTYLE NEW ENTRY

SHARE THE MOMENT

An easy way to make your mark online is by uploading your own photos. And, with families becoming more scattered across the world, it's also a great way to keep in touch. The fabulous Fotango has even gone one step further: enabling you to turn your photos into easily-sendable e-cards. And with a variety of backgrounds, cartoons and frames to add, you can show your family and friends you still have that sense of humour they all love you for.

Fotango gives both digital and conventional camera users the opportunity to share the photos online for free. Alternatively, send your film to them for processing and they'll upload your photos at no extra cost.

Their gift gallery is a real treat, too. Once uploaded, Fotango can turn your favourite picture into a bar of chocolate, frame it in a cuddly toy, or even transform it into a jigsaw puzzle for hours of winter fireside pleasure. Now what grandparent could resist that?
www.fotango.com

Funk and Wagnalls
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Illustrated Library
www.illustratedlibrary.com

<FOOD & DRINK>
e-licious ***www.e-licious.co.uk***
Meals For You ***www.mealsforyou.com***
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Restaurants.co.uk
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RoomService ***www.roomservice.co.uk***
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Thorntons ***www.thorntons.co.uk***
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Uncorked ***www.uncorked.co.uk***

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Future Games Network
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Gamers.com ***www.gamers.com***
GameSpot ***www.gamespot.com***
GameSpyder ***www.gamespyder.com***
GameStats ***www.gamestats.com***
MacGaming
www.maccentral.com/games
MultiPlayer ***www.multiplayer.com***
Nintendo ***www.nintendo.com***
PlayStation ***www.playstation.com***
Sega ***www.sega-europe.com***
Total Video Games
www.totalvideogames.com

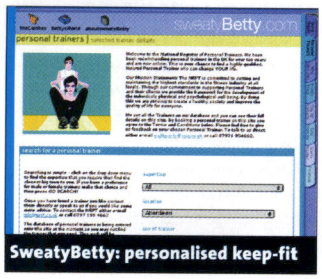
<GENEALOGY>
British Ancestral Research
www.brit-a-r.demon.co.uk
British Heraldic Institute
www.kwtelecom.com/heraldry
Family Search ***www.familysearch.com***
Genealogy Research Source
www.genealogy.book www.pro.gov.uk
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***

<HEALTH>
Doctors & diagnosis
Ask Dr Weil ***cgi.pathfinder.com/drweil***
Ask The Doc ***www.ask-the-doc.com***
BackCare ***www.backpain.org***
British Dental Association
www.bda-dentistry.org.uk
British Medical Journal ***www.bmj.com***
The Brompton Dental Clinic
www.mercuryfree.co.uk
Healthy Ideas ***www.healthyideas.com***
MedRef ***www.medscout.com***
Mental Health
www.mentalhealth.com
NetDoctor ***www.netdoctor.co.uk***
Patient ***www.patient.co.uk***
Pocket Doctor
www.pocketdoctor.co.uk

Support & information
Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Alzheimer's Disease Society
www.alzheimers.org.uk
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cancer Bacup
www.cancerbacup.org.uk
Centre For Online Addiction
netaddiction.com
Diabetes UK ***www.diabetic.org.uk***
Don't Smoke ***www.dontsmoke.com***
Fitness Online ***www.fitnessonline.com***
HIV/AIDS Information & Links
www.brad.ac.uk/staff/ijhodgson/hivlinks.htm

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS

National Meningitis Trust
www.meningitis-trust.org.uk
Natural Naturally
www.naturalnaturally.com



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ThinkNatural.com
www.thinknatural.com

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Cluttons Daniel Smith
www.cluttons.com
Foxtons ***www.foxtons.co.uk***
Friend & Falcke
www.friendandfalcke.co.uk
Goldschmidt Howland
www.goldschmidt-howland.co.uk
Hamptons ***www.hamptons.co.uk***
John D. Wood ***www.johndwood.co.uk***
Knight Frank ***www.knightfrank.co.uk***
Strutt & Parker
www.struttandparker.co.uk
Your Move ***www.your-move.co.uk***

Property finders
Accommodation Directory
www.accommodation.com
Assertahome ***www.assertahome.com***
Bamboo Avenue
www.bambooavenue.com
BBC Good Homes
www.goodhomes.beeb.com
Easier.co.uk ***www.easier.co.uk***
Global Resident
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Homefile UK ***www.homefileuk.co.uk***
Home Free Home
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Home Sale ***www.home-sale.co.uk***
Home to Home
www.home-to-home.co.uk
HouseNet ***www.housenet.co.uk***
Internet Property Finder
www.propertyfinder.co.uk
Lets Direct ***www.letsdirect.co.uk***
Move.co.uk ***www.move.co.uk***
Pavilions of Splendour
www.heritage.co.uk
Property Sight
www.property-sight.co.uk
Propwatch ***www.propwatch.com***
UK Property Gold ***www.ukpg.co.uk***

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www.comedyonline.co.uk
Comics.com ***www.comics.com***
Comedy Zone ***www.comedy-zone.net***
Cyber Comedian
webtamers.com/comedian.html
Funplanet ***www.funplanet.co.uk***
Funny ***www.funny.co.uk***
G-Wizz ***www.g-wizz.net***
JokeDepot ***www.jokedepot.com***
JokePost ***www.jokepost.com***
Jongleurs ***www.jongleurs.com***
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Uproar ***www.uproar.com***

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Reed ***www.reed.co.uk***

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brilliantcareers.channel4.com
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Overseas Jobs ***www.overseasjobs.com***
Personnelnet ***www.personnelnet.com***
Stepstone ***www.stepstone.co.uk***
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Yelcom ***www.yelcom.com***

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Fox Kids ***www.foxkids.co.uk***
FunSchool ***www.funschool.com***
Kidscom ***www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/mouse.html***
Mother & Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Nickelodeon ***www.nickjr.com***
Sesame Street
www.sesamestreet.com/preschool

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Anything!Student
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Atkidz.com ***www.atkidz.com***
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Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
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Virgin ***www.virginmobile.com***
Vodaphone ***www.vodafone.co.uk***

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Be Mobile ***www.yellphone.com***
Jippii! ***www.jippii.co.uk***
MonsterMob ***www.monstermob.com***
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YourMobile ***www.yourmobile.com***

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Eye4Money ***www.eye4money.com***
Financial Times ***www.ft.com***
Interactive Investor ***www.iii.co.uk***
Money Unlimited
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Motley Fool ***www.fool.co.uk***
Sharepages ***www.sharepages.com***
Stocktrade ***www.stocktrade.co.uk***
TaxAssist Direct Ltd
www.taxassist.co.uk

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Audi ***www.audi.co.uk***
BMW ***www.bmw.co.uk***
Citroen ***www.citroen.co.uk***
Ferrari ***www.ferrari.it***
Fiat ***www.fiat.co.uk***
Ford ***www.ford.co.uk***
Honda ***www.honda.co.uk***
Jaguar ***www.jaguarcars.com***
Lotus ***www.lotuscars.co.uk***
Mazda ***www.mazda.co.uk***
Mercedes-Benz
www.mercedes-benz.co.uk
Nissan ***www.nissan-europe.com***
Peugeot ***www.peugeot.co.uk***
Porsche ***www.porsche.co.uk***
Rover ***www.rover.co.uk***
Toyota ***www.toyota.co.uk***
Volkswagen ***www.volkswagen.co.uk***
Volvo ***www.volvocars.volvo.co.uk*** »

KIDS NEW ENTRY

CHILD'S PLAY: CAN YOU DIGGIT?

Kids will get a real kick out of Disney's newly-launched *Diggit* site. Based on the hit GMTV programme, the site gives 7-11 year olds the chance to get even closer to the *Diggit* cast and set, while also giving them the opportunity to create their own online character, adopt a virtual pet, produce their own online animations, play games and enter competitions.

We love the *Diggit* Webcam, which allows you to take a virtual tour of the studio from either the producer's, the presenter's or the show's mascot's (a King Charles Spaniel named Jasper) point of view.

The site is easy to navigate, bursting with colour and sound and a sure bet to keep your little ones amused for hours on end.
www.diggit.co.uk

<MUSEUMS & GALLERIES>

Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk
National Gallery
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Natural History Museum
www.nhm.ac.uk
Tate Gallery ***www.tate.org.uk***

<MUSIC>

Artists, DJs & radio

The Beatles
www.thebeatleswebsite.com
Blur ***www.blur.co.uk***
David Bowie ***www.davidbowie.com***
Coldplay ***www.coldplay.com***
Fatboy Slim ***www.normancook.cjb.net***
Gilles Peterson ***gpww.iscool.net***
Kylie Minogue ***www.kylie.com***
MJ Cole ***www.mjcole.com***
Radiohead ***www.radiohead.co.uk***
REM ***www.remhq.com***
Spice Girls ***c3.vmg.co.uk/spicegirls***
Stereophonics
www.stereophonics.co.uk
Travis ***www.travisonline.com***
Vdance ***www.vdance.co.uk***
Westlife ***www.westlife.co.uk***
WOD1.com ***www.wod1.com***

MP3

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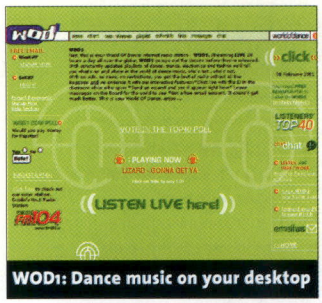
Brand New Music
www.brandnewmusic.com
Clickmusic ***www.clickmusic.co.uk***
Crunch ***www.crunch.co.uk***
Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***



WOD1: Dance music on your desktop

Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***
Mp3.com ***www.mp3.com***
Popwire ***www.popwire.com***
Vitaminic ***www.vitaminic.co.uk***

Online mixing

DJSounds.com ***www.djsounds.com***
eJay ***www.ejay.com***
Getoutthere ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***
Hobomusic ***www.hobomusic.com***
Home Recording
www.homerecording.com
Mouse Jam ***www.mousejam.com***
Scratch It ***www.turntable.de***
SS7X7 ***www.ss7x7.com***

<NEWS>

Newspapers

Telegraph ***www.telegraph.co.uk***
News Of The World
www.notw.co.uk
Guardian Unlimited
www.guardianunlimited.co.uk
The Independent
www.independent.co.uk
MegaStar ***www.megastar.co.uk***
The Mirror ***www.mirror.co.uk***
The Sun ***www.thesun.co.uk***
The Times ***www.the-times.co.uk***

News services

BBC ***news.bbc.co.uk***
CNN ***www.cnn.co.uk***
ITN ***www.itn.co.uk***
NewsNow ***www.newsnow.co.uk***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
Reuters ***www.reuters.com/news***

<PEOPLE FINDERS>

Email addresses

Bigfoot ***bigfoot.com***
EmailFinder ***www.emailfinder.com***
Friends Reunited
www.friendsreunited.co.uk
People Site ***www.peoplesite.com***
WhoWhere ***www.whowhere.com***
Yahoo ***people.yahoo.com***

Phone numbers

BT Directory Enquiries
www.bt.co.uk/phonenetuk
Thomson Directories
www.thomweb.co.uk
Yellow Pages ***www.yell.co.uk***

<SCIENCE>

News & updates

BBC Science ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm***
Eureka Alert ***www.eurekalert.org***
NASA ***science.nasa.gov***
New Scientist
www.newscientist.com
WhyFiles ***whyfiles.news.wisc.edu***

<SEARCH ENGINES>

AltaVista ***www.altavista.digital.com***
Ask Jeeves ***www.askjeeves.com***
Dogpile ***www.dogpile.com***
Electric Library ***www.elibrary.com***
FAST ***alltheweb.com***
Google ***www.google.com***
HotBot ***www.hotbot.com***
Inter-Change ***www.inter-change.com***
Lycos ***www.lycos.com***
MetaCrawler ***www.metacrawler.com***
Mirago ***www.mirago.co.uk***
Northern Light ***www.nlsearch.com***

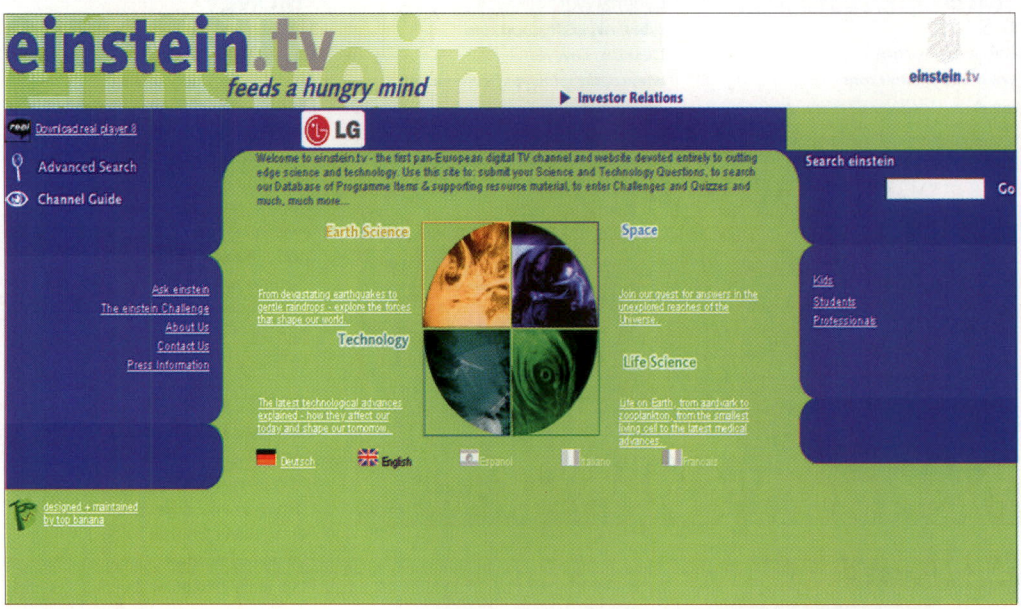
<SHOPPING>

Online auctions

Auction Hunter
www.auctionhunter.com
Auction Universe
www.auctionuniverse.co.uk
Bid4sport ***www.bid4sport.co.uk***
eBay ***www.ebay.co.uk***
eBid ***www.ebid.co.uk***
eSwap ***www.eswap.co.uk***
Eurobid ***www.eurobid.com***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
QXL ***www.qxl.com***
What Am I Bid? ***www.whatamibid.com***

Shopping directories

Best of British ***www.bestofbritish.com***
BritishShopping.com
www.british-shopping.com
Centreshop ***www.centreshop.com***
CleverPants ***www.cleverpants.com***
Coppernob Shopping.com
www.coppernobshopping.com
Cotswold Essential Outdoor
www.cotswold-outdoor.com
Crocus ***www.crocus.co.uk***
eDirectory ***www.edirectory.co.uk***
Enterprise City
www.enterprisecity.co.uk
The Gift Delivery Company
www.giftdeliveryco.com
Glasses-On-The-Web.Com
www.glasses-on-the-web.com
IMRG ***shops.imrg.org***
Inshop.co.uk ***www.inshop.co.uk***
Internet Shopping
www.internetshopping.com
Island Trading
www.island-trading.com
myTaxi ***www.mytaxi.co.uk***
ShopGuide ***www.shopguide.co.uk***
Shoppers Universe
shoppersuniverse.com
Shopping Superstore
www.shoppingsuperstore.co.uk
Shopping UK
www.internetics.co.uk/shop
ShopSmart ***www.shopsmart.com***
Shops On The Net ***www.sotn.com***
Shop Spy ***www.shopspy.co.uk***
Splendour.com ***www.splendour.com***
TopUKWebsites
www.topukwebsites.com
UK Shopping Zone
ukshoppingzone.co.uk
Virgin Net ***www.virgin.net/shopping***
Virtual Mall ***www.thevirtualmall.co.uk***



SCIENCE NEW ENTRY

E = MODERN LEARNING²

Designed to complement the programme on Sky Digital, einstein.tv gives Internet users the chance to learn about science through a series of clips, stills, articles and links. No groaning from the back! If science has never been your bag, don't worry; according to einstein.tv's Stuart Pearson, 'The aim is to make science accessible, entertaining and exciting – not stuffy or dry.' So there's still a chance to catch up. Alternatively, if you have children in secondary school, einstein.tv could provide a real boost to their course-work, and just think of what a hero you'll be...

Four key programmes are covered: life, earth, space and technology. Under each category are a compilation of reports to peruse; alternatively, use the search option to find what you're looking for. We were particularly impressed with the Site of the Month and Book of the Month links.

einstein.tv will also be hosting monthly competitions to test your science knowledge. There's MP3 and DVD players, and flat widescreen TVs up for grabs. So why not prove what a smart cookie you are? ***www.einstein.tv***

ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
Wedding List ***www.wedding.co.uk***

<SPORT>
FA Premiership clubs

Arsenal ***www.arsenal.co.uk***
Aston Villa ***www.astonvilla-fc.co.uk***
Bradford City ***www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk***
Charlton Athletic ***www.charlton-athletic.co.uk***
Chelsea ***www.chelseafc.co.uk***
Coventry City ***www.ccfc.co.uk***
Derby County ***www.dcfc.co.uk***
Everton ***www.evertonfc.com***
Ipswich Town ***www.itfc.co.uk***
Leeds United ***www.lufc.co.uk***
Leicester City ***www.lcfc.co.uk***
Liverpool ***www.liverpoolfc.net***
Manchester City ***www.mcfc.co.uk***
Manchester United ***www.manutd.com***
Middlesbrough ***www.mfc.co.uk***
Newcastle United ***www.nufc.co.uk***
Southampton ***www.saintsfc.co.uk/index.htm***
Sunderland ***www.sunderland-afc.com***
Tottenham Hotspur ***www.spurs.co.uk***
West Ham Utd ***www.whufc.co.uk***

Sport A-Z

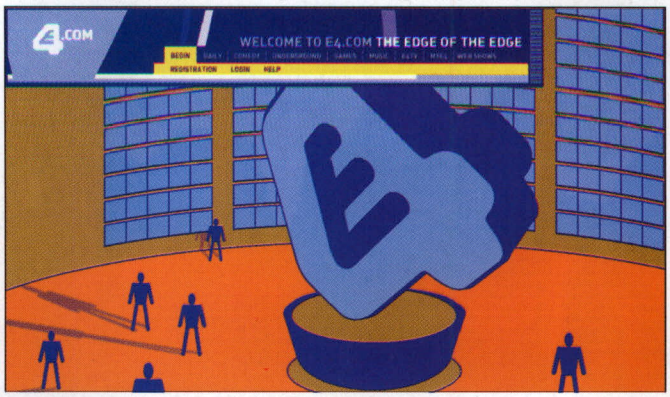
Athletics ***www.nuff-respect.co.uk***
Cricket ***www.cricket4.com***
Cycling ***www.cycleweb.co.uk***
Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
Golf ***www.golfweb.com***
Hockey ***www.fieldhockey.com***
Martial Arts ***www.martial-arts-network.com***
Motorsport ***www.autosport.com***
Motorbike Racing ***www.motograndprix.com***
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
Rugby League ***www.rleague.com***
Rugby Union ***www.scrum.com***
Snooker ***www.snookernet.com***
Tennis ***www.tennis.com***
Wrestling ***www.wwf.com***

<LIFESTYLE & FASHION>
Main sites

BeautyLink ***www.beautylink.com***
Boxfresh ***www.boxfresh.co.uk***
Cosmopolitan ***www.cosmomag.com***
Defining Edge ***www.definingedge.com***
Fashion And Beauty Internet Association ***www.fbia.com***
Fashionfile ***www.fashionfile.com***
Fashion Mall ***www.fashionmall.com***
FashionNet ***www.fashion.net***
Lifebyte ***www.lifebyte.com***
Models.com ***www.models.com***
TheRumour ***www.therumour.com***
Salonweb ***www.salonweb.com***
Style Experts ***www.stylexperts.com***
Vogue ***www.vogue.com***

<TELEVISION>
Top shows

Big Breakfast ***bigbreakfast.channel4.com***
Brookside ***www.brookie.com***
EastEnders ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders***



TELEVISION NEW ENTRY

FOUR IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Channel 4's new digital persona, E4, has its own Web site, didn't you know? At the time of writing it still had a little way to go before being fully functional, but it sure is looking good. To view the site you'll need Internet Explorer 4.01 or higher on your PC (a Mac-friendly site is under development), plus Flash and optional Shockwave and RealPlayer 8.

And what do you get in return? Loads of gag sites, clips from those bizarre E4 programmes, and an intriguing-looking but not yet running music channel. When you register be sure to fill out the questionnaire, otherwise you'll be banned from viewing the more adult content. ***www.e4.com***

Friends ***friends.warnerbros.com***
Hollyoaks ***www.hollyoaks.com***
The League of Gentlemen ***www.roystonvasey.co.uk***
Neighbours ***www.neighbours.com***
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? ***www.phone-a-friend.com***

TV companies

BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk***
Channel Four ***www.channel4.co.uk***
Channel Five ***www.channel5.co.uk***
ITV ***www.itv.co.uk***
ONdigital ***www.ondigital.co.uk***
Sky ***www.sky.co.uk***

<TRAVEL>
Airlines

Air Canada ***www.aircanada.ca***
Air France ***www.airfrance.com***
American Airlines ***www.aa.com***
Britannia ***www.britanniaairways.com***
BA ***www.british-airways.com***
BM ***www.iflybritishmidland.com***
Buzz ***www.buzzaway.com***
Continental ***www.flycontinental.com***
easyJet ***www.easyjet.com***

easyJet: Don't wait! Book a break!

Go ***www.go-fly.com***
Iberia ***www.iberia.com***
KLM ***www.klmuk.com***
Lufthansa ***www.lufthansa.com***
Qantas ***www.qantas.com.au***
Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***
United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Atlantic Airways ***www.virgin-atlantic.co.uk***

Destination guides

Amsterdam ***www.channels.nl***
Australia ***australia-online.com***
Bargainholidays ***www.bargainholidays.com***
Caribbean Islands ***www.gopelican.com***
Cheaperholidays ***www.cheaperholidays.com***
France ***www.franceway.com***
Germany ***www.germany-tourism.de***
Greece ***www.gogreece.com***
India ***www.indiagov.org***
Italy ***www.travel.it***
Ireland ***www.12travel.co.uk***
Japan ***www.jnto.go.jp***
Spain ***www.red2000.com***
UK ***www.exploreukland.co.uk***
US ***www.go-unitedstates.com***

Ferries

Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.poef.com/poef/index.htm***
Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***
Travel.World ***www.travel.world.co.uk/ferries.htm***
UK Camp Site ***ukcampsite.co.uk***

Rail travel

Euro Railways ***www.eurorailways.com***
Great Eastern Railway ***www.ger.co.uk***
Great Western Trains ***www.great-western-trains.co.uk***
Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport Information ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

Travel agents

Airtickets ***www.airtickets.co.uk***
Bargain Holidays ***www.bargainholidays.org***
Biztravel ***www.biztravel.com***
Usit Campus ***www.usitcampus.co.uk***
ebookers ***www.ebookers.com***
Expedia ***www.expedia.co.uk***
Holiday Deals ***www.holidaydeals.com***
Holiday Wizard ***www.holidaywizard.co.uk***
Internet Travel ***www.itsnet.co.uk***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
STA Travel ***www.statravel.co.uk***
First Resort ***www.thefirstresort.com***
Thomas Cook ***www.thomascook.co.uk***
Thomson ***www.thomson-holidays.com***
Trailfinders ***www.trailfinder.com***
Travel Choice ***www.travelchoice.co.uk***

<WEBCAMS>
Directories

Allcam ***www.allcam.com***
Camcity ***www.camcity.com***
Digital Camera Network ***www.dcn.com***
FlyOnTheWall.com ***www.flyonthewall.com***
Webcam Central ***www.camcentral.com***
WebCam World ***www.webcamworld.com***
Webviews ***www.webviews.co.uk***

Our Favourites

AfriCam ***www.africam.com***
Jennicam ***www.jennicam.org***
Ultimate Taxi ***www.ultimatetaxi.com***
Howletts Zoo ***howletts.net***
WalfordCam ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/webcam/index.shtml***

<WEB CENSORS>

Cybersnoop ***www.pearlsw.com***
Cyber Patrol ***www.cyberpatrol.com***
Net Nanny ***www.netnanny.com***
Xcheck ***www.xcheck.net***

<WEB DIRECTORIES>

About.com ***www.about.com***
4anything ***www.4anything.com***
AOL Netfind ***www.aol.com/netfind***
Excite ***www.excite.com***
Infoseek ***infoseek.go.com***
Liszt (mailing lists) ***www.liszt.com***
LookSmart ***www.looksmart.com***
Open Directory ***www.dmoz.org***
Thomson ***www.thomweb.co.uk***
WebCrawler ***www.webcrawler.com***
Yahoo! ***www.yahoo.com***
Yell ***www.yell.co.uk***

<WORLD GOVERNMENT>

Australia ***www.fed.gov.au***
China ***www.gov.cn***
European Commission ***europa.eu.int***
France ***www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr***
Germany ***www.bundesregierung.de***
Russia ***www.gov.ru***
United States ***www.whitehouse.gov***

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freeserve
www.freeserve.com

SIT BACK AND SURF

Put your feet up and enjoy the Web on your telly

PICTURES: RETNA

NO. 1 FOR THE INTERNET
Freeserve has everything you need to make the most of the Web

CURE THYSELF
Worried about your health? Visit Freeserve Health to find out if your symptoms are cause for panic

YOU AND YOUR MOBILE
Choose a ringtone to make your mobile phone as unique as you are

YOU CALL THE SHOTS
Find the right Internet call package to suit your needs

16 PAGES TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU USE THE WEB
NO. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

What you'll get from Freeserve

With a range of essential services and 18 channels packed with great content, Freeserve will change the way you use the Web

Welcome to Freeserve, the UK's No. 1 for the Internet. Whatever you want from the Internet, you can get it from Freeserve. We offer the very best content, covering all the topics you might want to read about. Whether you're into sport, travel, shopping or business, or you want to chat to others online, you'll find all this and much more on Freeserve Today, at *www.freeserve.com*. But Freeserve isn't simply the leading provider of Internet content. It's also the nation's most popular Internet Service Provider (ISP) and portal, with over 2 million members. They're all part of one big community who enjoy the many benefits of being online with Freeserve.

FREE INTERNET CALLS

Everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some people use it regularly at work or at college; others spend their evenings browsing at home. Still more will log on for just a couple of minutes every day. At Freeserve we offer you a choice of great-value ways to access the Internet, putting you in control of your charges. Freeserve AnyTime allows you free Internet calls at any time of day for just £12.99 a month. Then there's Freeserve HomeTime, which gives BT users unmetered access from 6pm until 8am during the week and all day at weekends – you simply pay a flat monthly fee on top of your BT phone bill. And Freeserve No Ties just lets you pay as you go, simply charging you the price of a local phone call while you're online. You can find more information on all these packages at *www.freeserve.com/time*.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, the new high-speed Broadband service for both homes and businesses. FreeservePlus for home works on a flat-fee basis of just £39.99 a month, plus a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details and information for businesses, see *www.freeserve.com/plus*.

EMAIL

Imagine what it must be like to receive post at any time of the day or night, within seconds of when it was sent. Well, that's exactly how email works. And with Freeserve, you don't have to pay a penny. Messages are free to send and receive – all you pay is the cost of the Internet connection call.

And now you have even more choice. Thanks to FSmail, our Web-based email service, you can check your Freeserve email from anywhere in the world – all you need is an Internet terminal. For more information, see *www.fsmail.net*.

MOBILE INTERNET

Because email is sent to and from computers, there's always the worry that you're missing vital messages whenever you're away from your PC. But now that needn't be a problem. If you have a mobile Internet phone (also called a WAP phone), you can use it to read parts of the Internet, including your Freeserve email. Which means you can read all your messages and stay up to date with the news and sports results, wherever you are. Find out more at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*

TALKING EMAIL

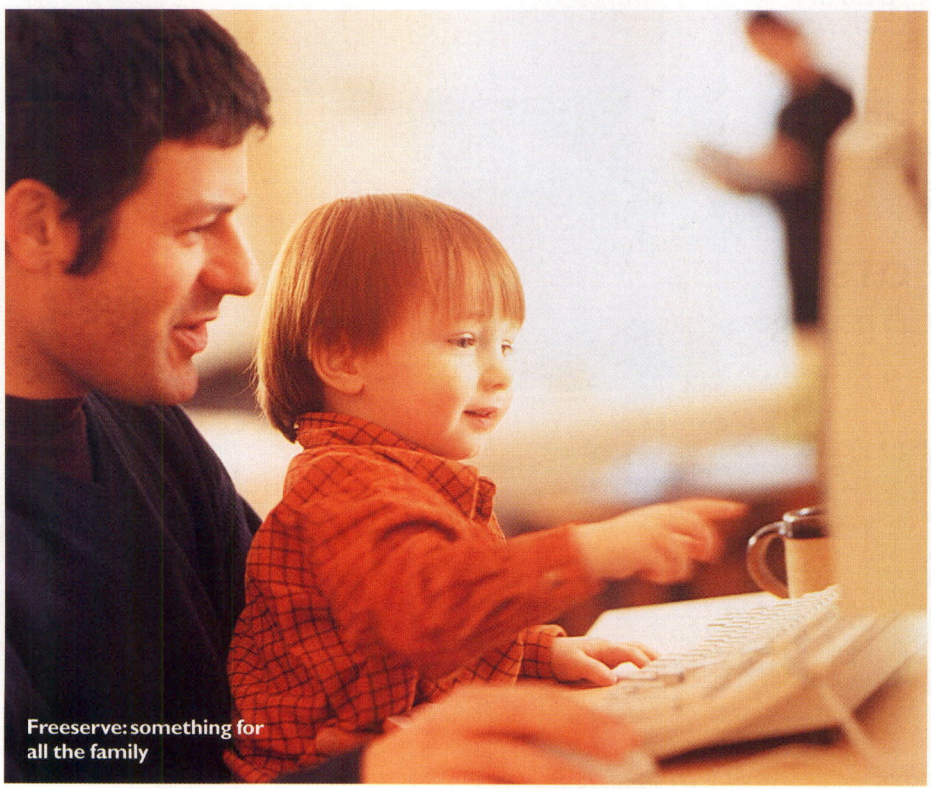
If you don't have a mobile Internet phone, you can still access your emails when you're away from your computer – by using Speechmail. This clever service lets you hear your email messages read to you over your mobile or wired phone by a special electronic voice. And as you would expect, there's no subscription charge for Freeserve members.

To use the service, simply sign up at the address below. You'll be given a personal phone number which you can ring to access your email. So no matter how important the message, you won't need to be at your computer screen to receive it.
www.freeserve.com/communications

YOUR OWN WEB SPACE

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are you'll be keen to build your own site. Well, now that's easy, thanks to some great benefits you'll receive as a Freeserve member.

We'll give you a massive 15 megabytes of free space in which to create your own site. You can make your site about absolutely anything you want – your favourite pop star, football team or even yourself! The free



Freeserve: something for all the family

software on the Freeserve installation CD, which you get when you sign up as a member, makes it easy to get your site up and running. With the help of Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.

THE BEST CONTENT

As well as free Web space, unlimited free emails and a choice of Internet access packages, at Freeserve we're also dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all under one roof:

at the Freeserve Today page, at *www.freeserve.com*. To make the most of Today, make it your homepage on the Web and check it every day to get a fantastic digest of all the latest news, weather and sport. You can even customise the Today page to suit your personal interests and then explore events more thoroughly on the relevant channels – there are 18 of them!

FREESERVE FOR EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE

Freeserve has a channel to suit every part of your life. Try the feature-packed Lifestyle channel, follow the stars with Entertainment, plan a holiday with Travel or buy your CDs,

books and much more on Shopping. If you have a small business, you'll want to keep up with the Business channel. There are also channels on Sport, Learning and Money, as well as the women's channel at icircle.com.

Finally, our email newsletter will keep you up to date with everything that's going on at Freeserve. It's all at *www.freeserve.com*

Sign up online at www.freeserve.com or pick up the Freeserve installation CD at Dixons, Currys, PCWorld or The Link. It's free.

A-Z CHANNEL GUIDE

WITH 18 CHANNELS TO CHOOSE FROM, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Auctions

Bid online for almost any item imaginable!

Business

Whether you've got an established business or you've just started out, Clearlybusiness.com, backed by both Freeserve and Barclays, can offer you support and advice. They can help you get your business online, too.

Careers

You're wired, now get hired, not fired! The Careers channel lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide. You can apply online to jobs you want, or submit your CV and wait for employers in your area to come to you!

Chat

The new, improved chat service is a great hit. You can use our 3D chat rooms to get around and explore virtual worlds, set up your own chatgroups, even chat to the stars with our new celebrity chat section.

Entertainment

All the latest film, music and television news can be found on Freeserve Entertainment. And now you can listen to the radio over the Web as well!

Games

If you're a games addict you'll want to keep up with Freeserve Games. Read reviews of the latest games, visit the virtual shop, pick up some top cheating tips and indulge yourself by playing online!

Health

The Freeserve Health channel will help you stay in tip-top condition, with information and advice on everything from the latest medical breakthroughs to alternative medicine.

Learning

From primary school right through to A-level and beyond, Freeserve Learning can help you and your family through your studies with its stimulating interactive learning environment.

Lifestyle

The Lifestyle channel is an exclusive features magazine which brings you the latest on everything that matters for the way you live your life, online and off. Lifestyle has something for everyone.

Money

Keep your finances healthy with expert advice from the Money channel. Whether you want savings tips, a mortgage or advice on choosing an ISA, you can keep your pocket full with Freeserve.

Motoring

Get on the road with the Freeserve Motoring channel, your one-stop shop for all your motoring needs. From insurance to breaking motoring news and reviews of the latest car models, you'll find it all on Motoring.

News and Weather

Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb news service. Read the national and international news as it happens, plus business, entertainment and sports news, and the weather.

Property

From finding the right mortgage to sorting the decorators from the cowboys, you'll find everything you'll need to look after your home and garden on Property.

Search

Use Freeserve Search to find anything you could want on the Web. As well as facilities to search all the Web, you can search more specifically for businesses and services, domain names and items for sale on the Auctions channel.

Shopping

At the Freeserve Shopping channel you can find a huge range of items, from flowers or food to a CD or a computer. Look out for great deals and savings from SHOP@freeserve and the new marketplace retailers.

Sport

Football, rugby, tennis, cricket, motorsport, golf – the list goes on. Whatever your sport, you'll find it on Freeserve. Get the latest results and follow your heros on the Freeserve Sport channel.

Travel

Visit the Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide. There are always sensational last-minute deals, plus weekend breaks and car hire – everything you need to find the perfect holiday!

Women

Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, icircle.com.

PICTURES: PA, IMAGEBANK, RETNA

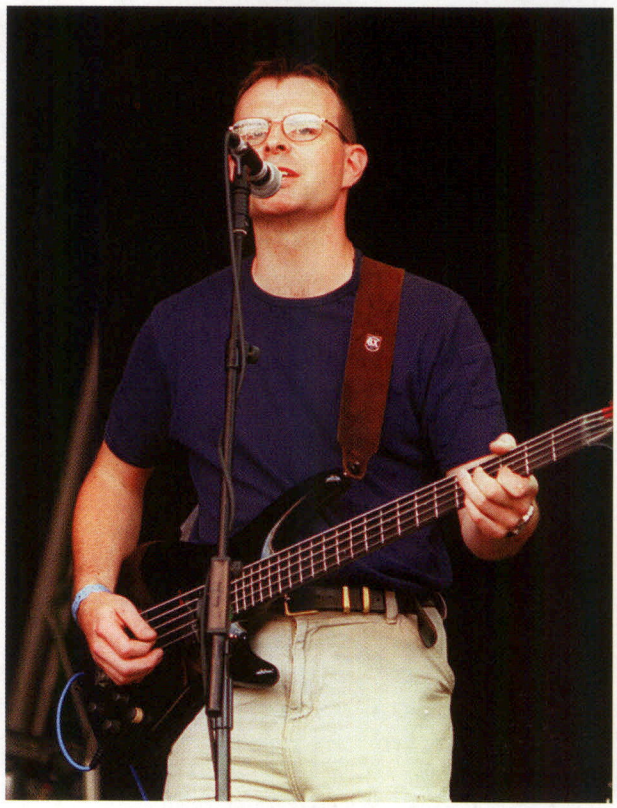
Discover the new Robbie Williams

With the new digital music section on Freeserve, you can hear the next big thing before everyone else does

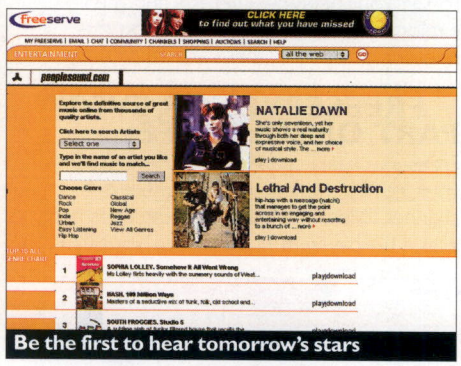
Ever wondered where you can download and hear the best new music available on the Web? Well, now you can get it on the new digital music channel from Freeserve, at *www.freeserve.com/entertainment*. The digital music content, produced in association with Peoplesound, Europe's leading new music Web site, gives you access to over 10,000 new and upcoming artists and 30,000 of their songs. You check out the tracks on the channel and then download them to your PC if you like them, so you can listen to them any time. And it's all completely free!

Every kind of musical style is available. So whether you're into indie pop, classical, laid-back blues or heavy metal, there'll be something there to suit your taste. There are several different ways to find the kind of music you like. Have a look at our weekly top 10 chart of new artists to see what catches your eye, or type in the genre of music you like and we'll find all the artists in that category. You can even type in the name of your favourite artist and we'll find other artists that you might like. And to make sure everything you listen to is of the highest quality, we listen to and review every track ourselves and are constantly scouting up and down the country to make sure you'll be the first to hear all the latest talent, from the best local bands to the hottest signings of the major record labels.

More and more great new artists are added all the time, so keep a look out and you could be among the first to hear the next Beatles or the new Robbie Williams. Watch out, too, for new features and facilities on the site as they become available. In the meantime, visit *www.freeserve.com/entertainment* and get listening to the stars of tomorrow today!



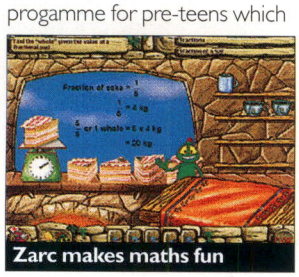
Find the cream of the country's new music talent on the Freeserve digital music section



Be the first to hear tomorrow's stars

Doing it for the kids

Most kids aged 7-12 would sooner watch cartoons or play computer games than do their maths homework. But with Edventure Learning, the new addition to the Homework Help section on Freeserve Learning, they can do all three at once! Edventure Learning is a fun, interactive software progamme for pre-teens which uses friendly cartoon characters like Zarc and Coco, as well as colourful graphics, to make education entertaining. Aimed at developing children's literacy, numeracy and language skills, Edventure Learning has over 4,500 activities based on the national curriculum, making it very popular with schools. But it's also a great way for parents to get involved in their children's education. Kids can use the software to supplement or reinforce their schoolwork at home, and parents can monitor their progress with monthly reports. You can use the software both on- and offline, and it costs just £50 a year or £5 a month to subcribe. Judge for yourself why it's so popular with our free 30-day trial available at *www.freeserve.com/learning*.



Zarc makes maths fun

A must for film addicts

We all know the results of this year's British Academy Film Awards, held in association with Orange; you can also find them on the Freeserve Entertainment channel. But if you want to know even more about this year's event, visit the new dedicated BAFTA section at *www.freeserve.entertainment/baftas*, launched just a few weeks ago. Here you can find out which stars were nominated, remind yourself of last year's winners and read all about the history of the BAFTAs. There are regular polls, too, where you can vote on issues such as the relevance of the BAFTAs today. And once you've brushed up on the BAFTAs, you'll be wanting to know how the results compare to those in the biggest annual event in film industry, the Oscars, held on March 25th. Freeserve is also launching a special Oscars section, at *www.freeserve.com/entertainment/oscars*, where you can follow the event from nominations to the results.

Freeserve brings the BAFTAs to you

Don't be shy to ask

Going solo with your business? With Clearlybusiness Community, you don't have to do it on your own

It can be a lonely life, running your own business. You've no one to rely on but yourself, and few places to turn to when you need a quick answer to a business question. Wouldn't it be useful if you could ask the advice of people who've been in the same boat and see how they dealt with the problems you're having? And wouldn't it be great if you could do it for free?

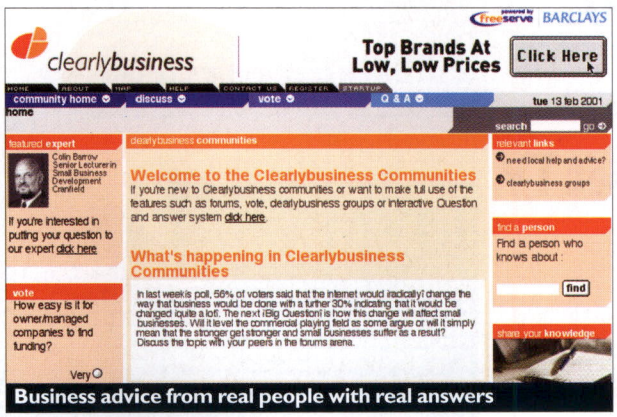
Clearlybusiness Community allows you to be able to do all this online. Launched early this year, the site enables people running their own businesses to access the knowledge and experience of online experts, to discuss their business problems with others, and to contribute to a regular poll on a topical business subject. With all these resources, you'll be able to solve your problems and increase your acumen at the same time.

Register as a member of Clearlybusiness and you'll be able to use the invaluable Q&A section of the site. This is the place to go if you want to know what you can claim back from the VAT man, how you become a limited company, or how you can develop your company's Web site. Not only can you get an answer from one of our featured experts, but with thousands of other businesses sharing their knowledge and expertise online, you'll be able to hear about people who've had real-life experience of the same problems.

Clearlybusiness knows that every business is individual and has its own problems. Community also offers you several categories packed with advice for every aspect of your business, from getting started, technology and IT to insurance, sales and marketing.

Do you think there's a risk that the media is taking us into a recession? What do you think about lying to get ahead? Join our online polls and discussion forums and get your point of view across. Clearlybusiness Community is committed to making sure the voice of small businesses is heard by the people who create and influence policy. So tell us what you think about the government's policies for small businesses – are they helping or hindering yours? What changes would you like to see? Through Clearlybusiness Community forums and discussion boards, opinions or questions can be posted on any relevant topic for other users to respond to. It's a great way to start developing a business community of like-minded people, or just to learn from the experience and wisdom of others. Do your business a favour and become part of the Clearlybusiness Community by registering for free at *www.clearlybusiness.com*.

Join Community and make the most of others people's business experience



Business advice from real people with real answers

NEWS IN BRIEF

APRIL 2001 AUCTIONS, ISAs, STOPPING SMOKING

BARGAIN BONANZA AT FSauctions

Don't miss the savings bonanza between now and Easter on FSauctions, the Freeserve Auctions channel. While you always have a good chance of getting a bargain when you bid online, for the next few weeks you'll find some truly amazing offers on holidays, computing equipment and other electrical items from top brands such as First Choice, Toshiba, Panasonic, Nokia and Ericsson, plus a variety of collectible memorabilia. With prices starting from just £1 and auctions taking place 24 hours a day, every day of the week, you would be mad to miss out! Make the most of the fantastic deals while they last by placing your bid at *www.fsauctions.co.uk*.

FIND THE RIGHT ISA

With the end of the tax year just around the corner, you only have a few weeks left to put your annual tax-free savings allowance into an Individual Savings Account, or ISA. There are scores of different ISAs to choose from, but the Freeserve Money ISA Centre will help you find the right one for you, whether you want to invest cash or shares. First-time ISA savers can gem up on all the latest news and information, too. So if you're not sure what to do with your savings, or you're having trouble making ends meet, our experts are on hand to help. Pay a visit to *www.freeserve.com/money* or email us with your questions at money@freeserve.com.

PACKET IN

Did you know that quitting smoking can improve your sex life? Or that stopping smoking will make your skin look younger? The Health channel on icircle.com (the Freeserve Women's portal, at *www.freeserve.com/women*), reveals these and other compelling reasons to stop smoking. And if you need an extra incentive, mark the occasion by starting on No Smoking Day, 14 March. Icircle Health will give you all the information and support you'll need, including seven proven ways to give up, from nicotine patches to natural remedies. Go to the quitter's discussion board to find out what's worked for others, or ask the resident expert for advice. Make this the year you give up and let icircle.com Health help you succeed. *www.freeserve.com/women*

Quit smoking with help from icircle

PICTURES: PA, RETNA

Surf from your sofa

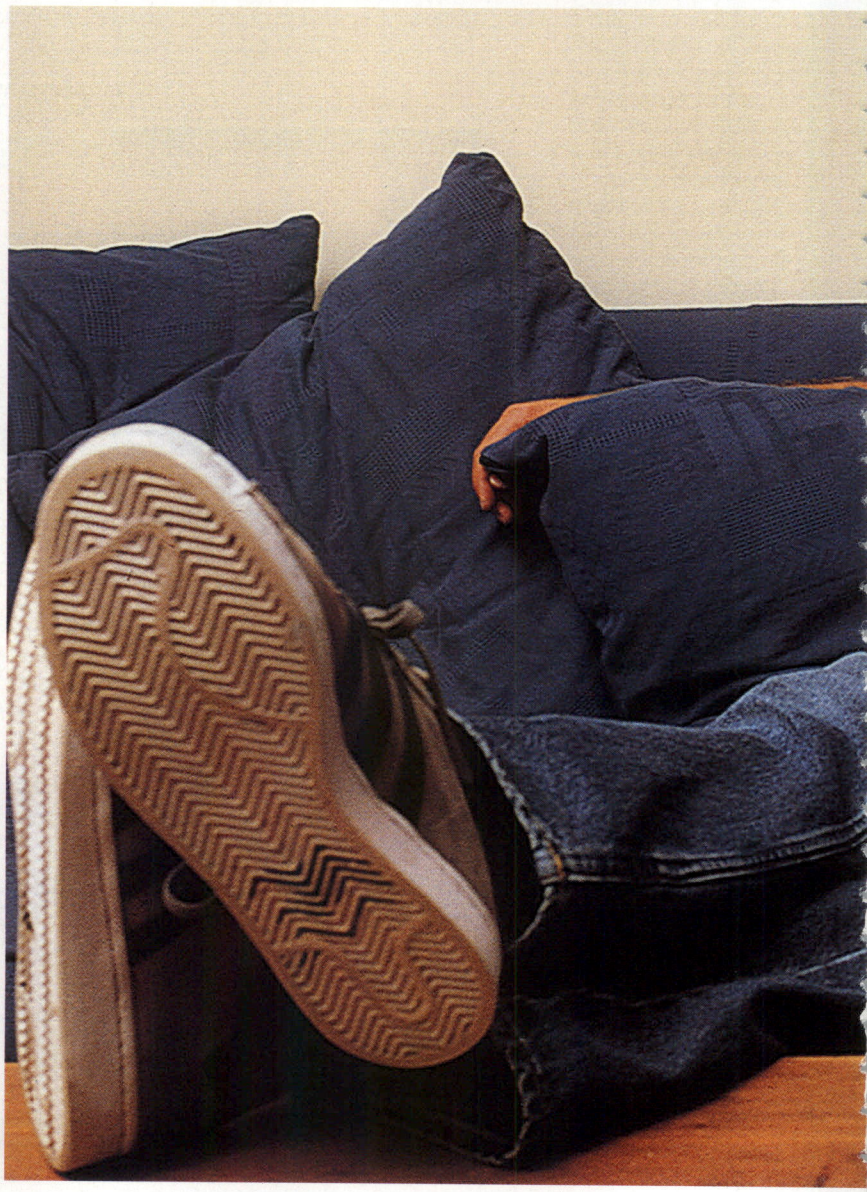
Enjoy the Internet just as you enjoy the football – relaxing in front of the telly with your feet up

It's been a long day. You started it on a busy train, squeezed against fellow commuters with an intimacy usually reserved for the bedroom; spent the morning meeting struggling against your eyelids as they threatened to embarrass you by closing of their own accord. For the rest of the day you sat in front of a PC screen, juggling the tasks of writing reports, reading memos and stretching to reach the coffee machine. Finding a few minutes to surf the Internet was impossible. Now, finally, you're home, and while you still want to catch up with your favourite Internet content, the last thing you want is to get back in front of a computer. The priority now is to pour yourself a drink, fix yourself a snack and put your feet up.

Sounds familiar? You're not alone. Anyone who works in an office will know that at the end of a long day at a computer screen, the last thing you want when you get home is any reminders of it. But until recently, if you've wanted to spend your leisure time browsing the Internet, there's been no choice but to get grudgingly back on the PC, almost as if you were back at work. But now you can be as laid back surfing the Web as you would be watching the football or your favourite soap – by kicking your shoes off, lounging on the sofa and accessing the Internet through your own TV. Thanks to new technology, the Internet is changing to suit your lifestyle.

Freeserve has already produced an entire portal designed especially for Internet TV

A special Freeserve portal just for Internet TV

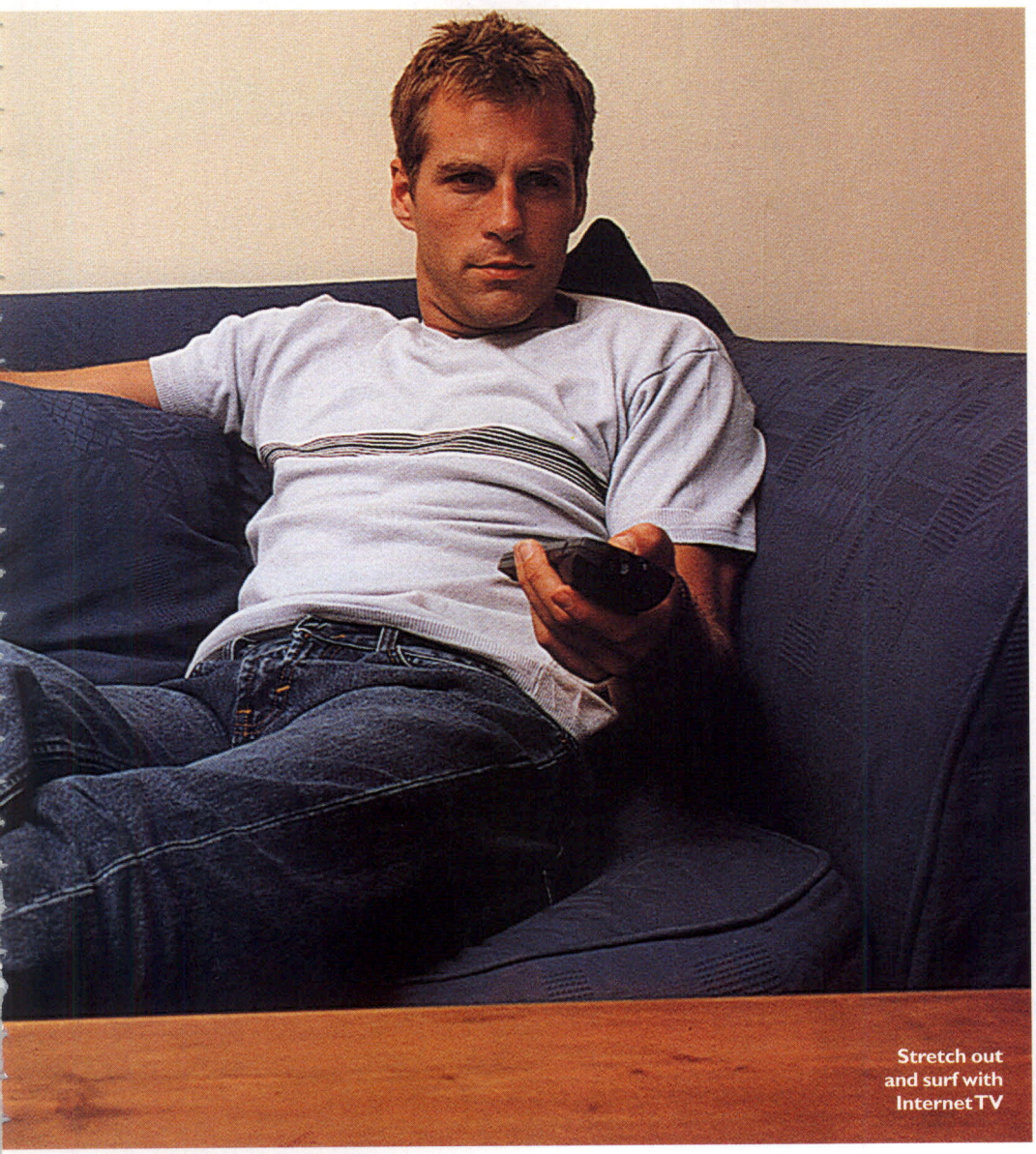


Surfing the Web on your TV can be just as relaxing as watching a TV show, and a lot more so if all you're doing is flicking frantically between the channels, trying in vain to find something you can wind down to.

Now you can be as laid back surfing the Web as you would watching the football or your favourite soap

Instead, you can order a Neopolitana with extra pepperoni online between checking the sports results and the latest news headlines (particularly useful if you've come home after the evening news); or just surround yourself with

With Internet TV your family won't have to share Web access



Stretch out and surf with Internet TV

treats, cushions and the cat while you take your time to browse through the latest showbiz gossip and online shopping deals. If you need a bit of company, you can visit a chat room or join a Smartgroup. Or you can just search the Net for information you need, or well-loved sites you want to go back to.

Not surprisingly, you can't access the Net with any old TV set, but as long as yours has a SCART socket (the connection you might sometimes use to plug computer games into), which most new sets do, then all you'll need to make it Internet-friendly is a Net access device like the Bush Internet TV Surf Set. If your television doesn't have SCART, now is the time to think forward to future Internet developments and invest in the Bush Internet TV, a TV set which comes with integral hardware making it automatically ready to receive the Internet. To actually connect to the Web, you simply plug the Internet TV or Surf Set into your phone line, just as you would with your PC, and use your remote control or keypad to navigate the Net.

It is, in fact, possible to access all of the Web with Internet TV. However, many existing sites need to be specially adapted to look as good on a TV screen as they do on your PC, and since the technology is relatively new, a lot of them still look incomplete when viewed on an Internet TV. Being ahead of the game, however, Freeserve has already produced an entire portal designed especially for Internet TV. It brings you eight Freeserve channels featuring all the content you might want to relax

PICTURES: IMAGEBANK, RETNA

GET INTERNET CONTENT ON THE TV

with. Book yourself a well-earned break by finding the perfect holiday on Travel; splash out on last-minute birthday presents on Shopping; have a flutter on Sport and Betting; or check out News and Weather, Entertainment, Money, Lifestyle or Women for all the latest Freeserve content. As well as all these packed Freeserve channels, there are links to the Internet TV-friendly sites of UK Invest, Gameplay, WHSmithonline,

All you pay to access the Web from your Internet TV is the local call rate

First Resort, 1ski.com, icircle (the UK's best women's channel), Simply Food and Jobchannel TV. The list grows longer every month.

It takes under 30 seconds to connect to the Web with Internet TV. So if, between television programmes, you see an advertisement for a CD you just have to buy, or you get sudden inspiration for the perfect holiday from a travel programme, you can switch in seconds from your regular TV channel to the Internet, then find what you want and buy it online before you forget. You could even email the details to a friend

Curl up and browse the Internet for shopping treats and dream holidays

or to mum and dad; by receiving the Internet on a TV set and using the remote control to navigate it, the Web needn't be as intimidating for them as it might be on a PC. Tell them it's like a super-delux version of Teletext or Ceefax. And if you're ill and have to stay at home, you can switch to the

SURF FROM YOUR SOFA

What you'll find on Freeserve Internet TV

ENTERTAINMENT Keep up to date with what the stars are doing

LIFESTYLE Everything you need to get the most out of your life

NEWS AND WEATHER Get the headlines as they break

MONEY Find out how to look after the pennies

SHOPPING Avoid sore feet and do it from your sofa

SPORT AND BETTING Fancy a flutter? Try your luck here

TRAVEL Find the perfect holiday without any of the stress

WOMEN There's everything here to make yourselves happy and healthly

Find the latest news and weather on the Freeserve Internet TV portal

Internet during the advertisements and email your friends from your sickbed…

So that you can have the Freeserve portal ready and waiting for you every time you log on to the Web with your Internet TV, Bush have produced special Freeserve editions of their Internet TV and Surf Set which come with the Freeserve Internet TV portal already loaded. So you need only connect to the Web to start enjoying Freeserve. Both the Internet TV and Surf Set are available on the highstreet exclusively at Dixons, Currys and selected branches of The Link.

If you already have a TV with SCART, you can get on to the Internet with the Bush Internet Surf Set alone, which costs just £78.99. But you can make a huge saving by investing in the 14-inch Bush/Freeserve Internet TV which, at just £169.95, costs only a fraction more than a standard non-Internet TV but provides a whole new viewing experience as well as regular television services. Because a Bush/Freeserve Internet TV costs so much less than a PC (which costs upwards of £600), it's a much cheaper way to get Internet access – ideal if more than one person in your household regularly wants to use the Internet at the same time but you don't want to shell out for another PC. All you need is a second telephone line to connect you to the Internet, and two of you can surf at once! And if you can't afford a PC at all but want to search the Web or send emails, Internet TV is the perfect solution.

Internet TV is cheap to run, too. Once you've invested in the hardware, all you have to pay to access the Web from your Internet TV is the local call rate – the same as you do for most Internet connections. This is normally just 1.5p per minute after 6pm, 1p per minute at weekends and 4p per minute during the day. There is no subscription fee and no joining fee!

Internet TV is the new way to enjoy the Web, allowing you more freedom to surf when and where you want at an affordable price. For more information, visit *www.freeserve.com/tv*.

Because a Bush Internet TV costs so much less than a PC, it's a much cheaper way to get Internet access

COMPETITION

Win a Bush Internet TV!

You can win a Bush Internet TV, worth £169.95, by entering the competition at *www.freeserve.com/competitions*. With the Bush Internet TV you don't need any extra hardware; just plug it into your phone line and you can surf to your heart's content, all from the comfort of your sofa!

PICTURES: RETNA

A doctor in your house

Whatever your problem, from splinters to stroke, if there's something wrong with your body Freeserve Health will let you know what's happening to you in a language you'll understand

Have you ever worried that a patch of dry skin might be more sinister than it looks? Or that your ingrown toenail might lead to amputation? If so, you'll be grateful for the new-look Freeserve Health channel. As well as bringing you sound advice on areas like Kids and Teens, or Diet and Nutrition, as well as a Shopping area and Health forums, Freeserve Health now lets you look up hundreds of medical complaints to find out if you're going to be OK. Because even if you're not a hypochondriac and you've a genuine concern about your health, you'll always want to know what's happening to your body when it starts to go wrong.

Of course, if you think there's a real problem with your health, you should always seek professional medical advice. But when you sometimes have to wait for days to get an appointment with your GP, you might be able to put your mind at rest sooner by checking your symptoms on the Freeserve Health channel at *www.freeserve.com/health*. From minor ailments such as aches, pains, coughs and bruising, to more serious illnesses like allergies, infectious diseases or heart disorders, Freeserve Health is packed with expert knowledge and advice from leading consultants to help you to understand your problem and how it can be treated.

If you've got a cold, you're probably better off not spreading germs

The Clinic section is an indispensable first-stop if you've a health problem of any kind, offering detailed and helpful information on a wide range of specific problems. For example, did you know that the common cold is actually a viral infection? The best your doctor will be able to do for you is give you antibiotics, but since these will only shorten the duration of your cold by a couple of days and may give you unwanted side effects, you're probably better off with traditional remedies than wasting time going to the doctor's surgery and spreading your germs to the other patients in the waiting room.

More seriously, if your child has a rash you might be worried that he or she is showing the early signs of meningitis. As well as helping to dispel the confusion caused by the media during recent scares, this section includes a video demonstration showing you exactly how to use a drinking glass to check whether the rash is indeed cause for concern – and immediate action.

If you have to have an operation, it can be an unsettling experience for you and your family. So, although most operations are successful, it's important to know what to expect of the operation procedure, the risks and the recovery period. If an elderly relative is having a coronary bybass, for example, it's useful to know that discomfort and several weeks of sore coughing, even after they've returned home, is perfectly normal. If you're not squeamish, you can even watch videos of operations like hip resurfacing or tonsil or cataract removal so that you know exactly what the surgeons are planning to do to you. And if you know someone who's convalescing at home after an operation or another illness, send them a jolly electronic get-well card to brighten their day.

Most of us get prescribed medicines at some time or another, and if we're lucky we only have to take one at a time. But sometimes it's necessary to take more than one medicine, and when the bottles only bear the chemical names of the drugs you're taking, it can

Child Health will tell you how serious your child's illness is

First Aid on Freeserve Health will prepare you for every kind of accident

be easy to forget what each one is for. Remind yourself by looking in the Medicines A-Z, which contains information about hundreds of medicines, what you'll be taking them for and what they do. And it doesn't matter if you only know the generic names or the trade name – you can search under either, or both.

And if conventional medicine doesn't seem to be doing the trick, you might want to consider something alternative, such as acupuncture, Indian head massage or just taking extra vitamins and minerals to supplement your diet. Detailed explanations of the theories behind various alternative therapies, many of them ancient traditions from Asia, will help to convert sceptics. After all, if conventional medicine hasn't worked for you, you'll have nothing to lose by trying something else!

But sometimes nothing seems to work to cure a problem. So if you're at your wits' end, why not ask other sufferers if they've a trick up their sleeve by posting your problem on the Discussion forum? You might finally find a cure for your partner's snoring problem – and get some sleep!

Even if you don't have to go to hospital, you might still have to have tests to find out what's wrong with you or which treatment will suit you best. You might have to give a sample of blood or urine, or go under the X-ray. Often enough, your doctor's instruction to the nurse who tests you will be written in a sort of medical code, and even if it's explained to you it can be difficult to understand exactly what the doctor is looking for. So if you're going to have a test or have just had one and are unsure what it was for, visit the Tests section and find out. You can look up everything from antenatal tests to blood, endoscopies, heart or urine – it's all there so you know what's going on.

But doctors aren't the only people who can look after your health. There's plenty you can do for yourself. For diseases like testicular or breast cancer, or for suspect moles, it's vital they are discovered early so they can be nipped in the bud. By carrying out regular self examinations of your testicles or breasts, you could help to save your own life. The Self Examination section will show you exactly how to do these examinations, with the help of downloadable videos with demonstrations to ensure you do them properly.

Perhaps the most useful skill you can have to look after yourself and your family is First Aid. Accidents can happen anywhere and at anytime, and when they do you might not be near a doctor. It's definitely worth carefully reading through the list of accidents and injuries in the First Aid section so that you're fully prepared for any emergency, from burns or spinal injuries to electric shock or even just getting something stuck up your nose! First Aid will tell you how to recognise a problem and what to do about it. You should learn how to deal with more serious emergencies, too, like asthma attacks, fainting, epilepsy and heart attacks. Remember, when an accident happens it's easy to panic and forget what you've learnt, so make sure that you've memorised the action plan so that it's automatic. The clear illustrations and video demonstrations on the Choking page make this even easier.

If you can't find a cure, post a message to other sufferers to ask if they've a trick up their sleeve

Students tend to live a hazardous lifestyle, engaging in a range of activities that put their health at risk, such as smoking, alchohol and unsafe sex. So it's important that they, too, know the dangers they're playing with and how to look after themselves. The Student Health section provides information and advice on everything that might effect a student's health, including drugs, nutrition and mobile phones.

Just about the last place you want to have an accident or get ill is on holiday, but if you're travelling to a hot climate you'll need to take precautions against new hazards like heat sickness, insect bites and food poisoning. Freeserve Health is full of advice for travellers, wherever they're going. You can also find out which vaccinations you'll need for the country you're visiting, and read about the importance of taking out travel insurance before you leave the country. And if you have a long flight you'll want to read about Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and how to reduce the risks.

Freeserve Health has everything you need to feel fully informed about your own health problems or those of your family. So whether you want to avoid unnecessary worry or you just want to make sure you're completely in the picture about your health, you'll find it all at *www.freeserve.com/health*.

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?

Just some of the clinics open on Freeserve Health

ALLERGIES From hayfever to nut cases

CANCER Get to know one of the UK's biggest killers

CHEST DISORDERS Take a deep breath

CHILD HEALTH Stop them snivelling

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT Say 'Aaaaaah…'

FIRST AID AND EMERGENCIES When not to get in a flap

HEART DISORDERS Looking after the thing that makes you tick

INFECTIOUS DISEASES Coughs and sneezes

LIMBS AND BACK Sticks and stones will break them

SKIN CONDITIONS Itchy, scratchy, all over your body

SPORTS INJURIES Pain on the pitch

STOMACH AND BOWEL DISORDERS What goes in …

PICTURES: CORBIS, GETTY

Music to your mobile

Wow your friends! Impress fellow travellers! With Freeserve you can choose a ringtone to make you and your mobile stand right out from the crowd

When mobile phones first appeared, back in the 1980s, they were too expensive for most people to afford. But as their technology developed, handset manufacturers and network providers reduced their prices, and these days almost anyone can afford a mobile. Even young schoolchildren have them to keep in touch with their parents!

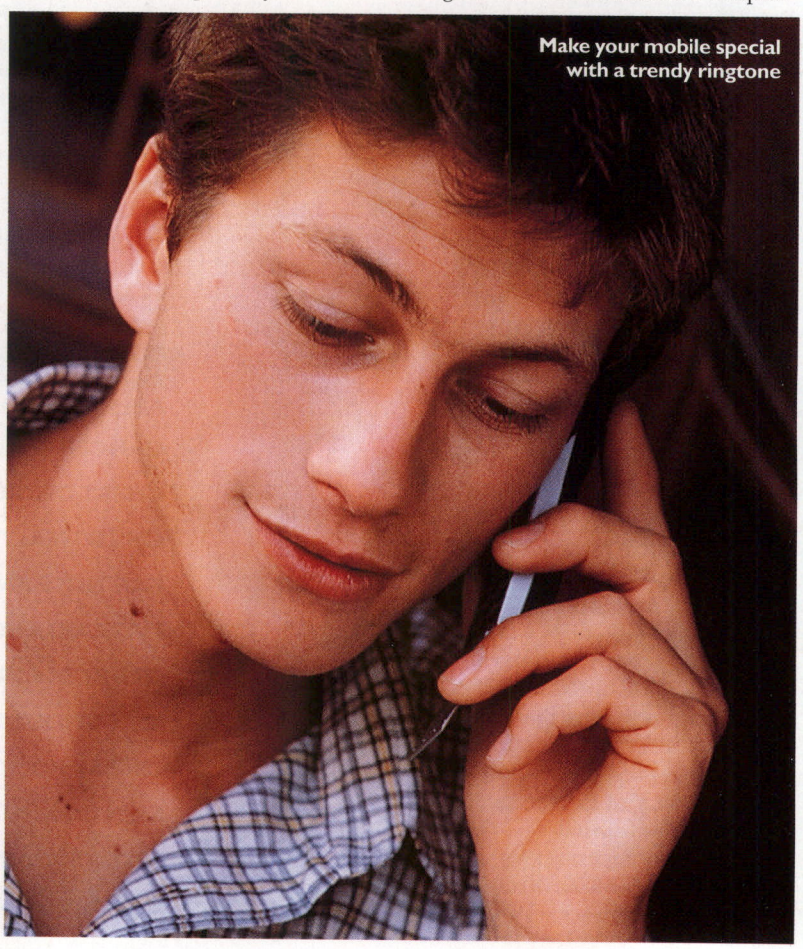
Of course, it's great that mobiles are no longer exclusive to the rich and successful, and that everyone can keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues wherever they are. But because everyone has one – and with only a handful of handsets and network providers available, the variety is limited – there is no longer anything individual about owning a mobile phone. In fact, these days, it's about as impressive as having teeth!

But now there's a fun new way to make your mobile phone stand out from the rest and impress your friends, the person you fancy or your fellow travellers on the way to work. We're all familiar with the few standard rings or ditties that most people's phones play when they ring. But if you've got the right kind of mobile, you can choose a funky or humourous tune from the Internet and install it as the ringtone on your phone. Having an exclusive ringtone is essential if you want yourself – and your mobile – to stand out from the crowd, and will earn you instant respect!

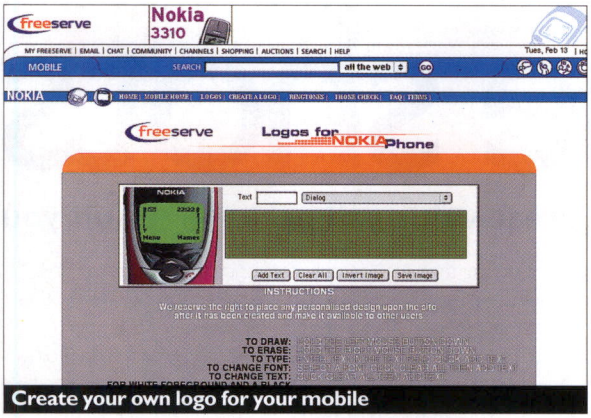
It's great that mobiles are no longer exclusive to the rich

If you've got a Nokia or Sagem phone, you can choose your special ringtone from the impressive range on the Freeserve Ringtones site, at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*. There's a huge range of categories of ringtones, such as music (including rock and pop, disco and techno, classical and golden oldies), film themes, sport (football club terrace chants, sports programme themes) or kids' cartoons, each containing loads of tunes guaranteed to make heads turn! You'll find everything from the latest British chart toppers to well-loved classical tunes, from TV themes of yesteryear to national anthems. Whatever your choice, it'll reflect your personality and let people around you know what kind of person you are – or that you want to be. For example, if your mobile plays Robbie Williams's *Millennium* when it rings, people will probably think you're a smoothy who's also game for a laugh; choose *The Muppet Show* theme and they'll guess you're a bit of a clown; pick *You'll Never Walk Alone*, the Liverpool terrace chant, and they'll know what the first love in your life is!

With Freeserve Ringtones you can hear any of the ringtones, just as they'll sound on your mobile phone, before you choose which one you want, so you'll know exactly what you're going to get. You'll need to check the compata-



Make your mobile special with a trendy ringtone



bility of your Nokia phone for receiving new ringtones, but you can do this at a glance by looking at the table on the site or by ringing the number below.

Once you've selected your ringtone, you take a note of the reference number next to it. Then, using any phone – wired or mobile, and it doesn't have to be the one you want to have the new ringtone – call 0906 957 9 957, which puts you through to a touch-tone automatic response. This number is a premium rate service; calls to it cost 75p per minute from a landline and last about two minutes. (Make sure you get the permission of the person who pays the bill before you call the number. If you call from a mobile you will be charged at a higher rate depending on your operator.) The automatic response will guide you through a series of menus to identify which ringtone you want and which mobile you want to use it on. A text message containing the code for the ringtone is then sent to the mobile. To install it, the user simply saves the message to the mobile's memory and selects it as their new ringtone.

And because you don't have to call the automatic response from the phone you want to receive the ringtone, you can send a great new ringtone to a friend as an original gift! You can even send ringtones for special occasions: there's *Happy Birthday*, for example, or *Jingle Bells*.

It's so easy and such fun to get a new ringtone that you'll probably want to keep changing it for one of the new ones which regularly appear on Freeserve Ringtones. Not only will you be able to impress your friends by having the latest pop tune as your ringtone, but also because they'll think you're a real expert with Internet technology!

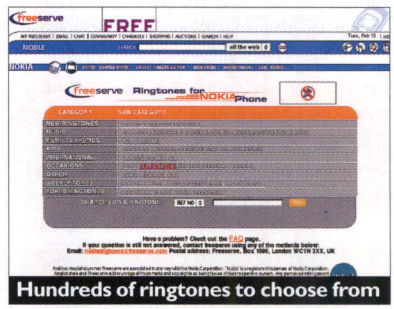
You can also make your mark with your mobile with Freeserve Logos, also found on the Freeserve site at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*. When so many people share the same kind of handset, this is a great way to personalise yours. Instead of the Network operator logo, such as 'Orange' or 'Vodafone', which appears on the screen of your mobile when it's in standby mode, you can have a logo from the large range available from Freeserve. And because there are so many logos, there's bound to be one which reflects your personality. If you and your friends put your mobiles on the table when you meet for a drink, and always get them confused when you go to leave, you'll be able to work out straight away which one is yours if it has a special logo on it!

Freeserve logos come in every shape and theme, from animals to spaceships,

Having an exclusive ringtone is essential if you want to stand out from the crowd

from a ferocious shark chasing a man to a cuddly teddy bear with lovehearts. If you're into snowboarding, you might want a picture of snowboarders; if music's your thing you could have some musical notes, a saxophone or a drumkit; for *Star Wars* fans there are the Jedi and Lightsaber logos. But if you want something completely individual, you can create your own logo with our special Logo Creator software. It doesn't matter if you're not a great artist – you can change or erase your design as much as you want, and in any case you'll still have something different to everyone else.

Most Nokia phones also have caller groups. You can also use the logo graphics to illustrate any of these, such as 'Friends', 'Family', or 'Work', so you can have an amusing way of reminding yourself what your caller groups mean to you. Perhaps you'll choose the bear or the three little pigs for family, perhaps the 'Evil spectre' for work – or the other way round! What ever you choose, personalising your mobile with a graphic image is a great way to give your mobile a character of its own. You get Freeserve logos on your mobile in exactly the same way as ringtones, which



means that you can also send them as gifts to other Nokia phone users.

With Freeserve you can access the biggest range of ringtones and logos available and have them sent to your phone with just one phone call and the touch of a couple buttons on your mobile, which makes it the best service of its kind. So, to make sure your mobile is the envy of all your friends, sneak off to *www.freeserve.com/mobile*.

TRY IT NOW!

Ringtones and logos are just a call away

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Craig David	Seven Days	**102978**
Only Fools and Horses	Theme tune	**106061**
Freestyler	Bomfunk Mcs	**102698**
James Bond	Theme tune	**102707**
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Calls charged at 75p per minute from a landline; calls from a mobile phone are charged at a higher rate depending on your operator. Some operators bar premium rate calls. Always ask the bill payer for permission to call. Average call duration is two minutes.

PICTURES: RETNA

You call the shots

Whenever you use the Internet, Freerserve has a great-value call package to suit you

What's so great about the Internet is that whatever your interests are, there's something there for you. No longer is the Web the exclusive domain of geeky technophiles sitting in front of a computer for hours on end – though they still exist! And because of this, more and more people are starting to use the Internet every day, from young children who need help with their homework, to the self-employed using online financial services, to the elderly pursuing their hobbies.

Just as everyone has different interests, so they have different lifestyles and times that they go online. Some people use it all day to do research for their work; some use it to browse in the evenings to find the perfect holiday; others will pop online for just a few minutes when they can, to buy a CD or send a couple of emails. And because we all use the Internet in different ways, Freeserve has a choice of four call packages, each offering great-value deals, however you use the Web.

If you use the Internet a lot during the day – whether for work or leisure (if, say, you finish your job in the early hours) – then Freeserve AnyTime is the package for you. With Freeserve AnyTime you can browse the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a subscription charge of just £12.99; the actual calls to the Internet are completely free! Because calls during the day are usually much more expensive than in the evening, AnyTime is fantastic value for anyone who uses it during peak-rate hours – between 8am and 6pm.

Freeserve has a choice of four Internet packages, each offering great deals

Whenever you use the Internet, there's a Freeserve package for you

You can start using Freeserve AnyTime within minutes of registering – to do that you need to be Freeserve member (you can join Freeserve for free by going to *www.freeserve.com*) with an existing BT phone line to use for the Internet connection. It's that simple.

But many of us are too busy at work during the day to browse the Internet; we just use it to send emails. So it's when we get home in the evening that the serious surfing begins. Freeserve HomeTime caters exactly for people who only use the Internet between 6pm and 8am. For just £8.99 you can surf the Internet as much as you like between these times; like AnyTime, the actual calls to the Internet are free. If you've got kids who spend all their evenings playing on the Net, you'll know that a package like this is ideal if you want stop them running up enormous phone bills when you're not looking! To get Freeserve HomeTime you need to be a Freeserve member with a BT phone line.

All you need to do is call BT to upgrade your normal phone

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www.freeserve.com

service to BT SurfTogether or BT Talk and SurfTogether, then register online with Freeserve for HomeTime; it will be up and running in just seven days. Not only does HomeTime give you great savings on your Internet charges, it also makes you eligible for savings on your BT phone calls!

Then there's Freeserve No Ties, the pay-as-you-go package with no subscription fee – you simply pay the price of a local call as long as you're online. No Ties is perfect for anyone who can only spare a few minutes to browse the Internet each day, perhaps just grabbing the opportunity when it pops up – ideal for busy mothers, for instance, or for people who work unusual hours. Both BT and cable telephone customers can use No Ties, though with BT you can make your calls even cheaper by making No Ties one of the numbers in your BT Friend and Family list. No Ties is the package you get automatically when you join Freeserve, unless you choose another one, and you'll be able to start using it as soon as you've joined.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, our special high-speed Internet service which gives you 24-hour access to the Web, seven days a week. It works by enhancing your existing BT phone line to allow you to surf almost 10 times faster that you would with the ordinary service and download material from the Internet to your computer in seconds instead of minutes. There are two FreeservePlus services – Freeserve Plus Home and FreeservePlus Business. FreeservePlus Home costs just £39.99 per month plus a one-off installation fee of £150 which includes all the hardware and software you'll need; an engineer will visit your home and upgrade your BT phone socket to take the service. For details about FreeservePlus Business see *www.freeserve.com/time*.

So whenever you use the Internet, and however much you use it, Freeserve has a fantastic-value package which means you know you're getting a great deal that suits your needs. To find out more about AnyTime, HomeTime, No Ties or FreeservePlus, visit *www.freeserve.com/time*.

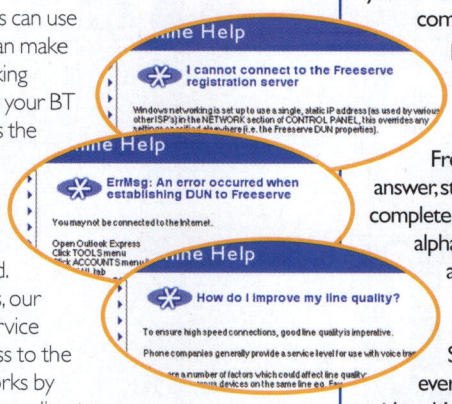
Pay what you want to Freeserve call packages

AnyTime £12.99 a month
free calls, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

HomeTime £8.99 a month
free calls every evening and all weekend

No Ties no subscription charge
pay as you go

FreeservePlus £39.99 a month
super-fast free calls, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week



www.freeserve.com/help

ONLINE HELP

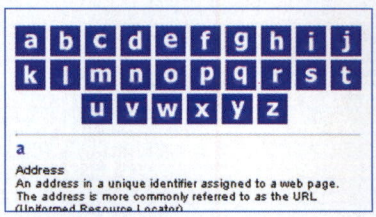
We've put together an awesome set of answers for all the technical queries that you might have. It's available on our Web site – and it's free!

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

If you're new to the Internet, Freeserve is committed to making it as easy as possible for you to get online. We've designed the help section on the Freeserve Web site so you can turn to Freeserve and get a straight answer, straight away. There's a complete content guide, a full alphabetical index of topics and a Find function – all designed to take you straight to the answer you need. Separate sections deal with everything you need to know to avoid problems before set-up, and tell you what to expect as you begin to install the software from the CD-ROM onto your machine. It really is that simple!

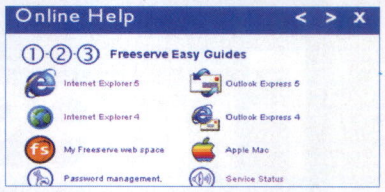
HOW DOES ONLINE HELP WORK?

It's easy! There are four main sources of information. Read through the descriptions below and you'll soon see which best suits the type of query you have. Then connect to Freeserve, visit the help section and get all your questions answered quickly.



THE GLOSSARY

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, turn to our glossary first. It's more than likely to be there.



THE EASY GUIDES

If there's an area of your Net use that is causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a complete solution. You'll find answers sorted by subject.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If there's a specific question you need answered, turn to our Q&A section for rapid help. First select the general area from our drop-down menu, then a specific question. You may find your question has already been answered.

CONTACTS

If you still need help, you can email our support staff. They're the same people who staff our phone helpdesks, and they're trained to deal with your queries. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page. They'll be happy to help you!

HOW DO I FIND ANSWERS ON THE CD?

Alternatively, there's also a fully comprehensive Help feature on the Freeserve start-up CD-ROM. When you put the CD in your machine you'll be given four options. The Help feature takes you to a comprehensive set of instructions to enable you to get online with Freeserve. *www.freeserve.com/search*.

PHONELINE HELP

Our experts are on call 24 hours a day

Using the Freeserve online help service couldn't be simpler, but from time to time you might have a direct question for one of our experts. To help you get the most out of your connection, the Freeserve Technical Support team is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure you've consulted our online help before you call, as you may find we've already answered your question. If not, our trained staff can provide you with instant answers in plain English on a range of Internet subjects. Calls cost 50p per minute.

PC Support 0906 2517517 Mac 0906 7234000

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

PICTURES: STUART HARRISON

surf the Internet without watching the clock

Freeserve AnyTime just £12.99 per month

Freeserve leads the way in making the Internet an easier, freer place. And we're doing it again with Freeserve AnyTime.

From January, Freeserve AnyTime gives you Internet calls, anytime, day or night, for an incredible £12.99 per month. Freeserve AnyTime provides all the benefits of Freeserve's fun-packed, easy-to-use, free service without the worry of spiralling telephone bills. No one else can match it.

So if you're a regular Internet user, register for Freeserve AnyTime right now, at www.freeserve.com/time

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www.freeserve.com

THE UK's No. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

Sign up online or pick up a free CD at any branch of

Dixons PC WORLD Currys The Link

See terms and conditions online. BT line customers only.

ADVICE CENTRE

Net help that's one step smarter

@ CHANNELS ://

> WEB DESIGN 108
Starting your own site needn't be a nightmare – as we discovered when we built an all-inclusive home page for TV favourite Sarah Cawood

> OUR TOP 50 ISPS 114
The results of our latest lab tests of 200 UK providers – plus our choice of ISP for every type of Net user

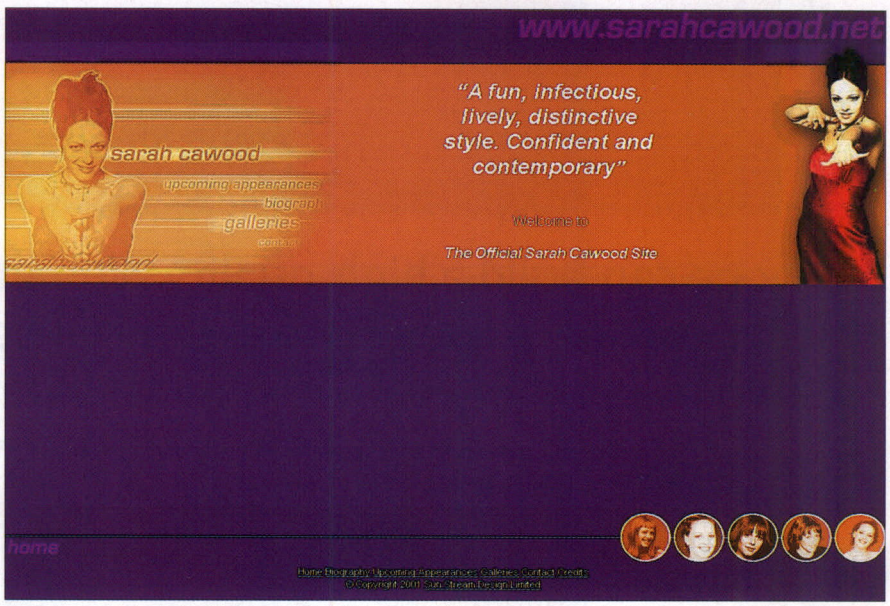
> UNMETERED SPECIAL 116
At last, you can surf 24 hours a day for one flat fee – we test the deals on offer and explain what it all means

> GETTING STARTED 118
Ensure that you've covered all the bases with our back-to-basics guide to email, the Web, chat and newsgroups

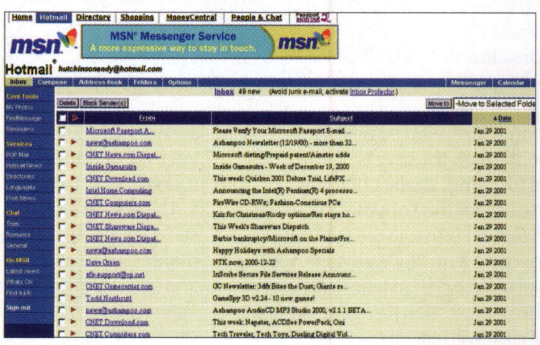
> TESTED WEBMAIL 122
Don't tie yourself to an ISP – we rate the services that let you access your email no matter where you are

> PORTALS 126
Giving your site added value doesn't have to take hours of hard work. We show you how to get free content from big names in a matter of minutes

> Q&A 132
Your pressing problems, from ISPs to email, solved by our team of dedicated Internet addicts



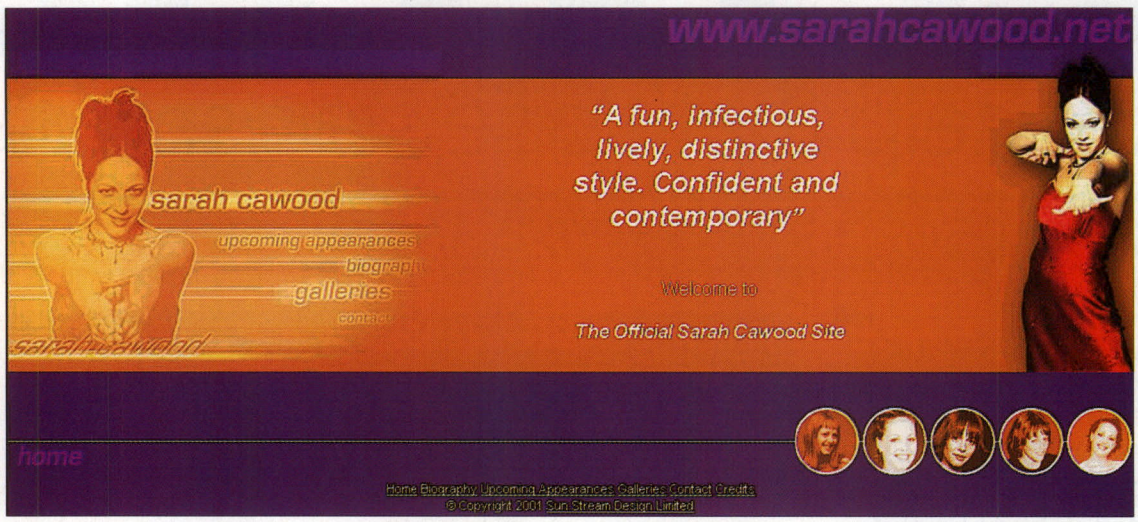
CELEBRITY SITE BUILDING Sarah Cawood's got one – and you can too…



WEBMAIL Just perfect for people on the move

PORTALS Build a supersite

Build your dream site



Anyone can build a high-quality Web site. Don't believe us? Then join us as we create an official home for TV's Sarah Cawood using the bare minimum of time – and hard cash

THE POPULARITY OF THE common or garden home page, an ordinary mortal's sovereign territory on the Internet, is proof positive that it's desirable to be able to have your own say about what interests you. The problem is that most home pages, almost by definition, are dreadful. If many of us were judged according to the design quality of our home sites, we'd be objects of hatred, dragged through the streets of Rhyl and publicly burned for crimes against humanity.

There is no excuse for this sorry state of affairs. The general perception is that in order to have anything approaching a quality Web page, you need a professional Web design team and a lot of money. And while a professional Web design team and a wedge of cash will indeed buy you an attractive site, it's not the only way to get one; the actual processes, once you break them down, are actually well within the capabilities of any of us.

Step 1: decide on content

In order to prove this point, we enlisted the talents of a professional Web design team (the nice people at Sunstream) and a celebrity (the lovely Sarah Cawood from television's *Live & Kicking*). We set the Sunstream team the challenge of designing a funky Web site for Sarah, one that reflected her character and which would serve as her presence on the Internet. And then we asked them to explain (using only small words) how they did it.

The end result, Sarah Cawood's own Web site, is still undergoing development. Over the next few months we'll see new content – including Flash and streaming audio – added to the site. But before all the flashy bits could be added, the basic site had to be built. It starts the way any Web site should, with a large mug of coffee, a sheet of paper filled with ideas and a blank HTML page called index.htm.

SARAH CAWOOD

With stints on the infamous *Girlie Show* and a popular team-up with Richard Blackwood on MTV2's *Singled Out*, Sarah Cawood was well primed for the demands of BBC's Saturday morning *Live & Kicking*. As part of the team put together to win back the audience that *CD:TV* had cunningly stolen, she's enjoying life on the frontline of live TV.

Sarah uses email to stay in touch with family and friends on a laptop. Her only official mention on the Internet had been the *Live & Kicking* home page (***www.bbc.co.uk/kicking/crew/sarah.shtml***), but she's keen to have her own official presence ,if only to encourage foreign Cawoods to get in touch. Her search for Cawoods ('it's a good Yorkshire name going back to the 17th century') began a few months ago and turned up a several in America.

Does she use the Internet for practical purposes? 'Yeah. I do quite a bit of shopping online at La Redoute and Amazon, of course, and at the Odeon Web site, but that's been broken for ages now. They should sort their lives out. I'm on the Jungle mailing list too, I keep getting annoying emails from them.' She also tried to watch the *Big Brother* Webcasts, but had trouble convincing her PC to download the appropriate bit of software.

Like many people trying to get to grips with the Internet, Sarah says she lacks some of the basic computer skills. 'I want to go on a simple course to get it sorted. Apart from anything else it'd be valuable if and when the whole presenting thing comes to an end.'

We wondered whether she was concerned about being misrepresented on the Net. 'I knew there were a couple of vaguely dodgy sites out there, but I haven't seen them.' We have a quick nose around on Google and turn up a couple of naff video-captured images of Sarah, mainly in her Girlie Show days, but she seems largely unconcerned: 'At least they haven't made any of those nasty montage jobs.' Not yet Sarah, give 'em time.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR SITE

PLANNING

Before you even switch on your computer, spend 10 minutes planning the layout of your site and you'll probably save 10 hours during construction. Your design document doesn't have to be grandiose; simply decide on the sections you're going to include, what you're going to call them and how they'll link together.

Probably the easiest way to do this is by drawing a tree diagram. At the top of the page is your home page, the first place visitors to your site will see. Underneath this, draw boxes representing the sub-pages and draw links connecting them up. Once you get about three pages deep into the site you'll discover that there are some interesting ways you can link pages together. For instance, every page should have a link to a contacts or help page.

Now you have a design down on paper, imagine surfing the site and track your route through the pages. Is it taking you too many clicks to get to a particular page? Can you rationalise things so that it's not so complicated? The golden rule is that it should take you no more than two clicks to get to a specific page.

When you're happy with your design, you can begin work on the home page. Start your HTML programme and create a page called index.html (it has to be called that or Web browsers won't automatically load it when they visit your site) and add your basic navigation links.

COLOURS

Finding the right colour scheme – the colours of the background and text – is absolutely crucial, because it sets the theme for the entire site. Above all, resist using the standard Internet colours (white background, black text, blue links) because it looks like you've made no effort.

To find a scheme that works, try to settle on a background colour and then experiment with text colours. If you're using something like Paintshop Pro it's a cinch to change text colour. You'll find some combinations look horrendous and others are plain illegible. Remember that the best combinations of colours are those that sit opposite each other in the colour palette.

For Sarah's site, the Sunstream team plumped for a funky purple background, married to an orange foreground. They used variations on those colours for the main page title and simple crisp white for the introductory text. This sort of colour scheme works well for someone as up-front as Sarah, but probably wouldn't suit a firm of undertakers.

The team used shades from the same palette to great effect. The main logo text and page indication text are lighter shades of the main background colour, which works really well, particularly with such strong images on the page already.

CUTOUTS

The Sunstream team took images of Sarah, used an image retouching program to cut the main image out from the background and then placed that on the Web page.

To create your own cutout you'll need a program like Paintshop Pro. Load the image, select the Magic Wand tool and click on the background. If the wand doesn't neatly select the entire background area, try changing the tolerance settings and clicking again. Alternatively you can use the lasso tool to draw around the main image by hand. Once you have the main image select, copy it (Ctrl C), create a new document and paste it in.

It should take you no more than two clicks to get to a specific page

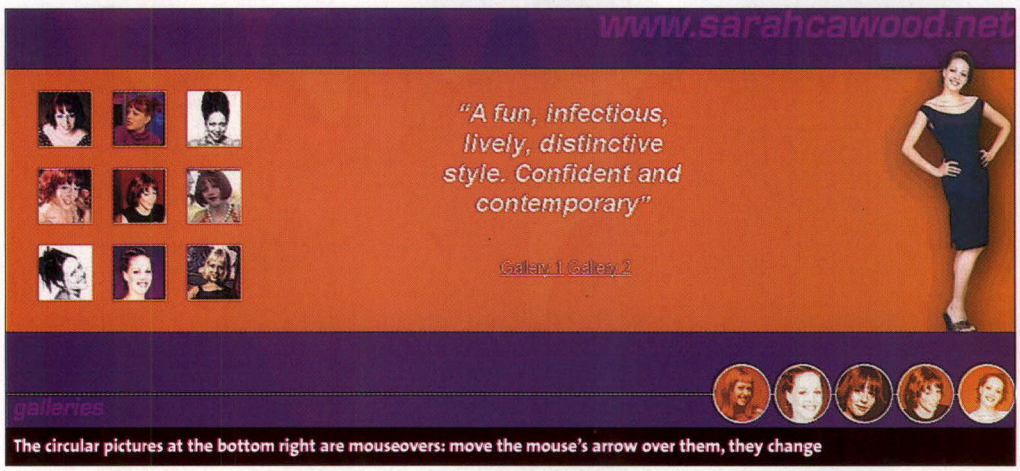
Once you have a cutout image you can resize it, modify the background or add a range of effects such as the tinting that the Sunstream team added to the smaller image of Sarah on the main page. To have the background showing through you need to save the cutout as a transparent GIF with your background colour set as the transparent colour.

When creating a cutout, you don't have to be pixel perfect. GIFs are only comprised of 256 colours, so they naturally look quite 'bitty' when you see them on a page.

FONTS

When the Internet was designed, one of the basic elements built into it was that a page viewed on any computing platform (be it PC, Mac or Unix) would look exactly the same. For this reason a basic set of six fonts were chosen (Arial, Times, Courier, Georgia, Verdana and Geneva) and we've been stuck with them ever since.

If you want to use fonts other than the big six, you have to create your text in a graphics program and save it out as an image. That's not always a good thing, however,



The circular pictures at the bottom right are mouseovers: move the mouse's arrow over them, they change

Step 2: make it all look pretty

because images take a lot longer to load than plain text. Whenever possible, use actual text because it flows properly on the page and takes up far less bandwidth.

Even working within the constraints of the basic six fonts, you can still get a considerable degree of variety on the page. You can alter the fonts sizes and use bold and italic settings for a twist on the basic look. You might find that actual text (rather than text in an image) looks far better on-screen anyway.

In this case, Sunstream made good use of Arial, one of the more modern looking fonts. It is used in the main welcome text and in the links at the bottom of the screen.

MOUSEOVERS

The buttons at the bottom of the screen, which you use to navigate the site are basic mouseovers, by which we mean that when you waft your mouse pointer over them they change. There are endless variations on the basic mouseover, but even at their most basic they're very useful because they make the screen almost tactile.

If the buttons you're using to direct people around your site are quite fiddly, then the mouseovers give a useful visual indication of where you're pointing. In this case, however, the buttons are nice and large and include mouseovers more as a design element than a basic navigational aid.

The best way to create a mouseover is to let a program like Imageready do all the hard work for you. Imageready 3 is bundled with Photoshop 6 and enables you to quickly create mouseovers from a basic layered image. Download the free demo of Photoshop and you'll even find that it will create the HTML code for you.

Homesite, Dreamweaver, Hotdog and Coffee Cup all include mouseover facilities enabling you to bring a bit of movement to what is inherently a very static medium. Once you've got to grips with the mouseover, you can experiment with more exotic flavours, such as the mousedown.

TEXT

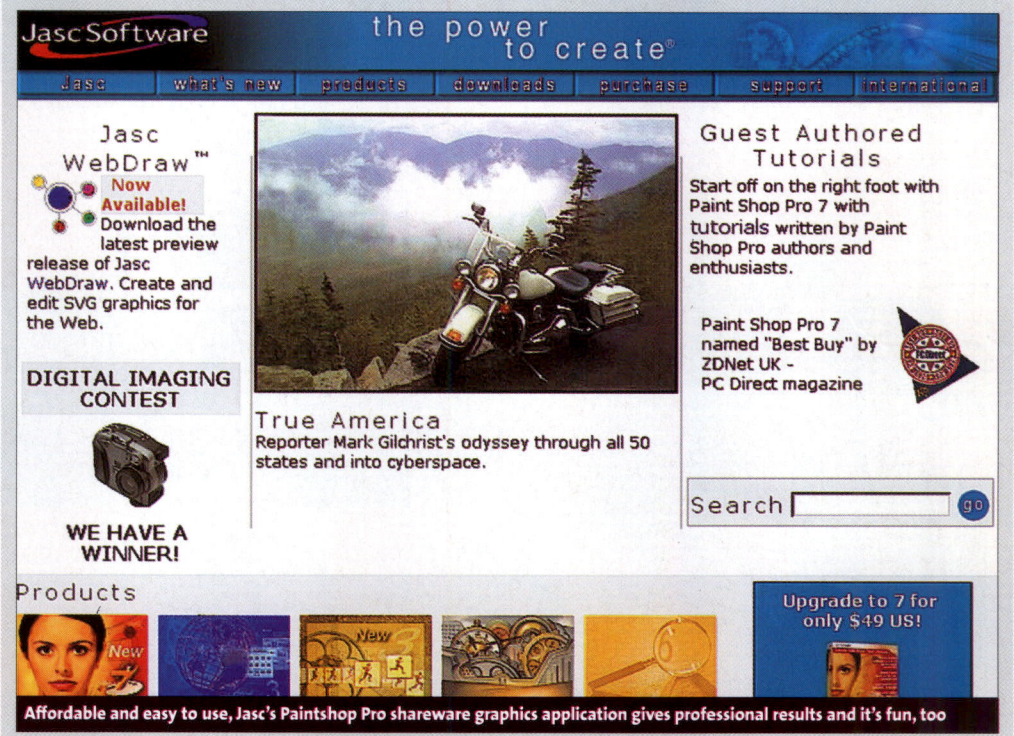
One of the biggest mistakes people make when designing Web sites is to make assumptions about the types of computers and browsers other people use. It will come as a surprise to many Webmasters that there are folks out there surfing the Internet with text-only browsers. Web sites should reflect that.

We're not saying that we should go back to the dark ages when the World Wide Web was a mass of Times text and devoid of images,

PROGRAMS TO MAKE DESIGNING AND UPLOADING YOUR SITE A DODDLE

TOOLS FOR THE JOB»

Back in the Jurassic period of the Internet (six years ago) just about the only way to design a Web site was with a little text editor such as Microsoft's Notepad or Apple's BBEdit. While some purists still claim that's the only way to create a page, the rest of the world has cheerfully embraced a range of powerful HTML design programs.



Affordable and easy to use, Jasc's Paintshop Pro shareware graphics application gives professional results and it's fun, too

DREAMWEAVER MACROMEDIA £269

www.dabs.com

The choice of the professionals – and, indeed, the program that Sunstream used to create Sarah's Web site – Dreamweaver is simply light years better than any other HTML design program. And while it's not the cheapest application you'll find, it's so perfectly adapted to the job that it makes designing even the most complex Web sites an absolute doddle.

Dreamweaver includes a WYSIWYG design window (complete with raw code view for the benefit of the technically proficient), superb behaviours (to make mouseovers) and even a complete FTP suite so you can transfer your finished site from your computer to the remote server. If you're worried about buying Dreamweaver and finding it too intimidating, download the free demo at ***www.macromedia.com.***

FIREWORKS MACROMEDIA £269

www.dabs.com

These days Web sites rely more on graphics to get their message across and while you can use any graphics program to create the furniture for your Web page, a program like Fireworks will save you time and effort. Macromedia designed Fireworks specifically to meet the demands of Internet graphics design and for this reason it includes image compression and optimisation features, along with advanced slicing facilities that enable you to transform one big image into lots of smaller ones. It'll even write the HTML for you.

Dabs: downloadable design packages

WSFTP PRO IPSWITCH £20

www.ipswitch.com

Once you've created a Web site, you need an application like this to transfer your site (unless you have a program like Dreamweaver which has FTP built in). WSFTP Pro is specifically designed to interact with Web servers. All you do is point it at the local copy of your Web site (on your hard drive) and the location of the remote server (usually a four-part number like 128.2.131.4) and hit the transfer button.

PAINTSHOP PRO JASC £65

www.jasc.com

This superb shareware graphics application is behind probably half the visual content on the Internet. It matches most of the features of the expensive commercial graphics packages and adds a few neat ones of its own. Paintshop Pro includes animation features, layers and 75 funky effects to give your images a distinctive look.

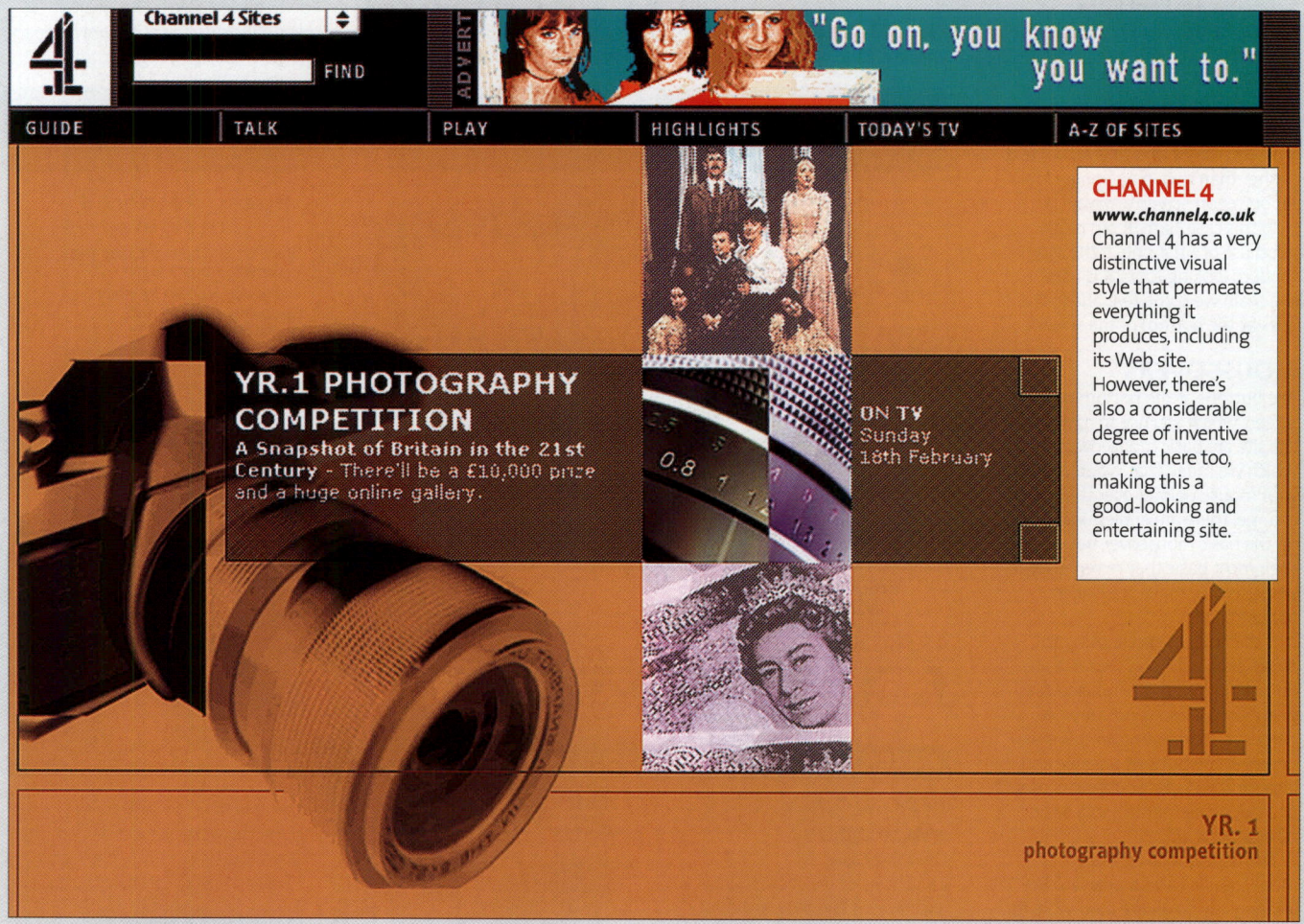
FRONTPAGE 2000 MICROSOFT £99

www.dabs.com

If you're familiar with Microsoft programs like Word and Internet Explorer, then you'll probably find yourself immediately at home with their HTML design program, Frontpage. Frontpage 2000 has a staggering array of features and also includes some excellent basic templates which enable you to get a Web site up and running without any grief. Probably the best option if you're completely new to Web design.

HOW TO BALANCE STYLE AND CONTENT LIKE A PRO

THE SITES TO AIM FOR>>

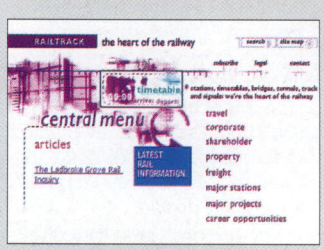


CHANNEL 4
www.channel4.co.uk

Channel 4 has a very distinctive visual style that permeates everything it produces, including its Web site. However, there's also a considerable degree of inventive content here too, making this a good-looking and entertaining site.

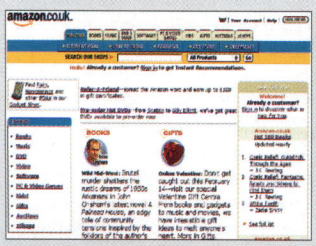
RAC *www.rac.co.uk*

Many companies make the mistake of turning their Web sites into little more than billboards, but the RAC features some extremely useful content married to a clean, concise design. Whether you're an AA or DirectLine subscriber, odds are you'll bookmark this travel site.



RAILTRACK *www.railtrack.co.uk*

Another example of clear design and high utility value. Even on a 33k modem this site loads quickly, which must come as a huge relief to weary rail travellers trying to find some way to get from A to B on the extremely useful backend rail database. Smart.

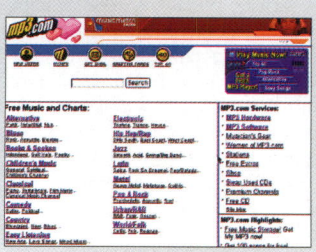


AMAZON *www.amazon.co.uk*

This Web site's most powerful feature is prominently displayed front and centre on the home page: that search box. Amazon realises that most people are looking for a specific book, DVD or CD and enables you to get stuck straight in with no messing about.

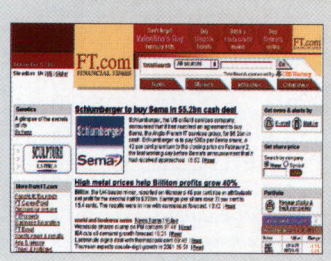
BBC NEWS *news.bbc.co.uk*

Considering the amount of information on the main BBC news site, it's still extremely easy to navigate. Main stories are displayed front and centre, while features are to the right. Nice of them to include a low graphics version, too.



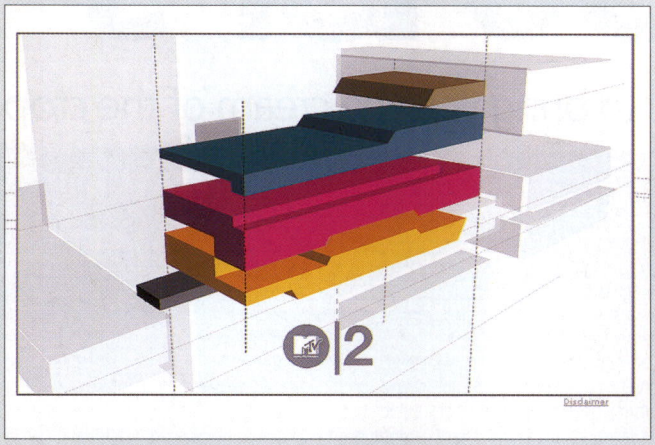
MP3.COM *www.mp3.com*

You'd be forgiven for thinking that all great Web designs were graphics heavy, but mp3.com is a brilliant example of content over style. Whatever your taste in music, you're only one click away from it.



FT NEWS *news.ft.com*

This site, too, has a serious amount of information to get across. The use of small, crisp graphics combined with a smattering of search windows means that the busy executive can quickly zero in on the information they require. You can also customise the whole site.

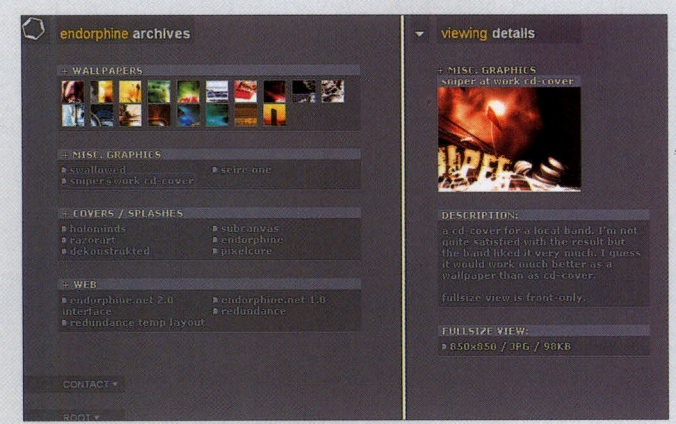


MTV2 ***www.mtv2.co.uk***

It's the use of Flash that makes MTV's alternative music channel succeed in its bold effort to stand out from its better-known brother. Despite the extensive visual content, this is still an extremely useful site, with some highly user-centric content.

BRITANNICA ***www.britannica.com***

Nobody could quite believe it when the Encyclopedia Britannica group put its entire content online. Even more surprisingly, the site's extremely easy to use, with a search box prominently displayed and informative feature-style content occupying the remainder of the home page space.



ENDORPHINE ***www.endorphine.net***

This site, dedicated to PC desktop wallpaper, not only features some great content, but combines it with an effortlessly stylish look. Frames can be abused, but here the designers have utilised them in a way that makes navigating and examining the content extremely easy.

Step 3: sit back and admire

but you can at least cater to people who surf with images turned off by including text navigation. That's precisely what the Sunstream team have included here: the little text navigation bar at the bottom of the screen enables those with images turned off to navigate the site.

THE URL

People often spend months creating Web sites that are designed to delight and enthral the surfing public. Then they take their amazing creation and saddle it with a URL so long and convoluted that it looks like a directory listing gone-wrong.

These days a good URL (.com or .co.uk) will cost you as little as £10 for two years. Consider that for a second: you get full rights to www.myurl.com, you can create a Web site and point that URL at your Web space. You can use it for email (myname@myurl.com) and maybe even sell it on for a tidy profit.

There really is no excuse for not registering your own URL. If you choose something suitably esoteric, you can use it for a whole range of Web sites. Obviously in this case our choice of URL was a no-brainer because we're dealing with a celebrity site, but we found that someone had already registered sarahcawood.com and .co.uk, henoce the sarahcawood.net listing.

Getting the right URL makes your site seem far more professional, so sit down with a dictionary, fire up ***www.easily.co.uk*** and keep trying combinations of words until you find one that works – and one that can be repeated without the need to spell it out.

COPYRIGHT

There are people out there who will cheerfully rip off every last piece of code on your Web site, so if you're dealing with something that you've created, or which you own, such as Sarah's photo portfolio then you should add the appropriate copyright notices on the site.

Don't forget to include copyright notices in the actual source code too. It's the job of a moment to use that 'view source' option to get a perfect copy of the whole Web site. Try to attach copyright notices to individual images as well.

DIMENSIONS

One of the most common Web design mistakes you'll see is where someone with a big monitor has assumed that everyone else has the same kit, with the result that their site that spreads off the edges of smaller monitors. How can you stop this happening?

Most professional Web designers base all their pages around the basic 800x600 resolution. They don't anchor any of the page furniture to a particular position; rather they position everything relatively. This means that if the Web browser resizes, the furniture moves to accommodate it. It's extremely easy to use and can make the difference between someone hitting the back button and the bookmark button.

SUNSTREAM

www.sunstream.co.uk

Many thanks to the Sunstream team for pulling together this excellent Web site in such a short space of time.

Sunstream can be contacted on 01732 459 941.

SEE FOR YOURSELF AT ***www.sarahcawood.net*** **– keep checking back for new features.**

Our top 50 ISPs

April 2001 We tested over 200 UK ISPs to bring you the cream of the crop

ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	PHONE	EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends				
F9 Free	www.f9.net.uk	Free ISP from previously subscription-only service Force 9	0800 0737800	Unlimited
Knowall	www.knowall.net	Large business ISP for SMEs and home users with business needs	0207 6101115	Unlimited
Free Online	www.free-online.net	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email	0870 7060504	5
Sniff Out	www.sniffout.net	Free Internet Provider with features, content and technical support	01883 742510	Unlimited
Gateway 2000	www.ukgateway.net	An ISP from the retailers of the same name. Packaged with computers	Gateway stores	Unlimited
UK Online Ltd	www.ukonline.co.uk	A family-friendly free ISP with plenty of shareware and gaming	01749 333333	1
The X-Stream Network	www.x-stream.com	Uses on-screen advertising to offer 0800 deals and voice/fax email	0870 7306466	1 Unified
Freeserve	www.freeserve.net	Free provider from the Dixons group of companies	0990 500049	Unlimited
Free Internet	www.free-internet.co.uk	Free access, free mail and Web space	Sign up online	1
Powergen	www.pgen.net	ISP from PowerGen, the energy supply company	0900 2909158	5
Freenet	www.freenet.co.uk	Free access with a gaming bias. Online auto signup and newsgroups	01329 828282	Unlimited
Smartone	www.smartone.co.uk	Content-based service offering free dial-ups and rewards for visiting	08700 774411	1 Unified
Dabsol	www.dabsol.net	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features.	Sign up online	Unlimited
Freewire	www.freewire.net	To use the service set your computer up to dial 0845 088 0088	Sign up online	Unlimited
Breathe	www.breathe.co.uk	Recently went into external administration, but still trading as an ISP	0800 500150	5
Tiny Online	www.tinyonline.net	Innovative ISP with a beginner's guide to the Net	0900 290 9103	5
Go Free	www.gofree.co.uk	Free ISP offering online signup, complete with helpline	Sign up online	Unlimited
Virgin Net	www.virgin.net	Long-standing ISP now offering a stylish free Internet access service	0500 558800	5
Callnet	www.callnetuk.com	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced Web-based services	0171 3358300	5
Freeway	www.freewayuk.com	Free access, free mail and Web space.	0906 6903319	Unlimited
Free to You	www.freezyou.co.uk	No frills free ISP with online sign-up.	Sign up online	Unlimited
OrbitalNet	www.orbitalnet.co.uk	Subs-based ISP with a range of account options to suit any needs	01233 646505	5
Eisdosnet	www.eidosnet.co.uk	From Eidos, publishers of Tomb Raider and a host of other titles	Sign up online	Unlimited
Wireplay Internet	www.wireplay.com	Gameplay-owned with access to fast games servers and the Web	0845 757 7577	None
This is it!	www.thisisit.co.uk	End-user targeted free ISP	0906 9124000	Unlimited
UVNET	www.uv.net	Rare free ISP offering support on a standard national number	01753 776699	1
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing				
GTS Netcom	www.netcom.net.uk	Dial-ups, Web hosting and leased line access for home and business	0800 9809107	20
AOL	www.aol.co.uk	A large ISP offering an 'ease of use' oriented service	0800 3765432	5
Netscalibur	www.netscalibur.co.uk	Promising pan-european provider taking the place of Dircon	0800 0720000	Unlimited
Aviators Network	www.aviators.net	An ISP designed with aircraft-related content for the enthusiast	0700 2842867	1
Timewarp Internet	www.timewarp.co.uk	Friendly knowledgeable team giving a professional service	0161 950 8855	1
Luna Internet	www.luna.co.uk	Small, customer-friendly ISP	01782 855 655	1
Internet in Nottingham Ltd	www.innotts.co.uk	Local midlands Provider with a long track record	0115 956 2222	1
PINS	www.pins.co.uk	Paradise Internet are a subscription provider who also author software	01256 414863	1
NewNet Limited	www.newnet.co.uk	Five years experience in the industry	0845 355 44 55	1
UKIP (Net Consultants) Ltd	www.ukip.co.uk	Trading as an ISP since 1995	01772 908000	1
Compuserve	www.compuserve.com	Long standing ISP who offer proprietry software to aid ease of use	0990 000200	5
Charis Internet Services	www.charis.co.uk	Customer support for businesses online	0121 248 5800	1
Which? Online	www.which.net	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine of the same name	0645 830240	1
Easynet Ltd	www.easynet.net	Subscription-based dial-up service. Winner of Best European ISP	0171 6814444	Unlimited
ClaraNET Ltd	www.clara.net	Subscription-based ISP with a range of account options	0800 3582828	Unlimited
Demon Internet	www.demon.net	Launched in 1992, the first dial-up service around	0845 272 0666	Unlimited
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses				
Firstnet Services Ltd	www.firstnet.co.uk	Business solution provider developing bespoke IP integration packages	0113 2944224	Unlimited
AdeptWeb Ltd	www.adept.co.uk	Full ISP service range and an ASP service for business accounts software	01843 850444	Unlimited
UUNet	www.uk.uu.net	Wide range of business solutions and Pipex Dial	08702 424220	12
London Web Comms	www.londonweb.net	London ISP offering connection and design to consumers and business	0208 3494500	3
CYBERphile Internet	www.cyberphile.co.uk	Business-oriented, Midlands-based provider	01543 454840	1
AngliaNet Limited	www.anglianet.co.uk	Dial-up, Web hosting and design for home and business users	01473 211922	1
FDD Ltd	www.fdd.co.uk	A Netscalibur-aquired company offering IP integration services	01865 321003	1
CIX	www.cix.co.uk	Specialise in conferencing and voiceover IP solutions for business	0845 3555050	Unlimited

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Apple Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

Reliability, speed of connection and value for money are the three criteria we weigh up to objectively identify the best ISPs and award star ratings.

Variation in modem speed Measures whether you get a constant speed once connected. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses position the greater the variance in connection speed.

Variation in time to connect The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, through the engaged tone or failure to respond correctly to modem signals.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you is correct. The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme should contact ***eval@netbasics.com***. For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

CONTENT	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE (£)	MONTHLY CHARGE (£)	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS	VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	National	7-11, 7 Days	★★★★★
Business search, 12 channels, domain registration	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Premium Rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	National rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	Free	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Chat, news, lifestyle, shopping, entertainment	No	K56flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Newsgroups & IE5 download	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Games links	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	None	National rates	9-6pm M-Sat, 10-5pm Sun	★★★★☆
Links of general interest	Yes	V.90	None	None	Metered	9-6 Mon-Sat 10-5 Sun	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales	No	V.90	None	None	Local	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
News, web TV and radio amongst others	Yes	X2	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Chat servers, channels, services, news and mail	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	Free	24/7	★★★★☆
News, sport, weather, shopping	No	K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute/online	24/7	★★★☆☆
Search engine page and technical support	No	V.90	None	None	Available soon	n/a	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Local	Business Hours	★★★☆☆
Free access to the Mplayer games network	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★☆☆
Games news, games chat, games add-ons	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	50p per minute	12pm - 12 am, 7 days	★★☆☆☆
None	No	K56Flex	None	None	£1 per minute/via e-mail	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	None	Free	24	★★☆☆☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	14.95	National	24/7	★★★★★
Large amount of content , all AOL software	Yes	V.90	None	9.99	Free	8-10.30 M-F 9-9.30 Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	11.49	Local	9-9 7days	★★★★★
Listings including flight planning and navigation	No	K56Flex	None	11.75	Standard	9-9 7 days	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	100 p/a	Metered	9am-7pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	12.50	Local	8am-9pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	See site	Local	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, X2	None	8.00	National	11-7 M-F	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	99 p/a	Local	09:00 to 10pm	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	125 p/a	National	8.00 - 18.00	★★★★☆
Portal style site with a large range of channels	No	V.90	None	7.50	National	8-12 Midnight 7 Days	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	15.00	Free	8am-7pm	★★☆☆☆
Online shopping with consumer protection	Yes	K56Flex	None	7.75	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex	None	11.99	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	8.99	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	11.75	Local	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Search engines and support	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	12.50	Local	Business Hours	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K65Flex	None	100 p/a	Local	8.30am-6pm	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	Apply	Apply	Call for details	9-8 M-F, 10-6 Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	15.00	12.50	Standard	9-9 M-Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	33.6	None	11.74	Standard	8.30-6.00 M-F	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	11.75	Mobile	9-5 M-F, 8-9 M-S, Sun 12-6	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	22 p/a	Free	9-5.30	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	14.99	Local	8 - 10 w/days, 11 - 6 w/ends	★★☆☆☆

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

Flat-fee access: the truth

EXCLUSIVE TEST **We've looked at every major player to bring you our verdict**

After a seemingly endless wait, false starts and some high profile casualties, the ISPs are proclaiming the arrival of workable flat-fee Internet access. In a variety of packages and supplied by numerous telecoms companies, it's now possible to connect to the Internet, at any time of the day or night, for a flat monthly fee, with no extra phone costs.

AOL: a fierce exponent of the flat-fee model, now coming to a screen near you

That's big news for Net users: no more anxiously watching the clock as you wait for a download.

We've put the major ISPs currently offering flat-fee access to the test, rating them for ease of connection and speed of connection to give you the earliest verdict on which service you should plump for.

There'll be no more anxious watching the clock as you surf the Web

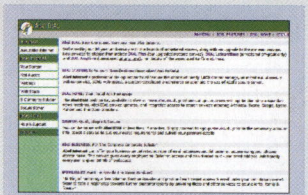
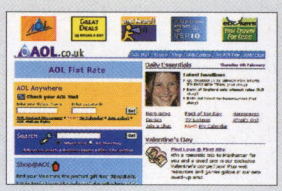
During the last couple of months, viable services provided by companies such as AOL, BT and Telewest have come on-stream. More importantly, with the first of the ISPs installing their own equipment in local telephone exchanges, it won't be long before the end user can pick or choose their providers.

With such a huge user base, AOL's flat-fee service has already proved popular. BT Internet have now launched their unmetered dial-up (£15 a month, 24/7) and take-up has been similarly popular. By April there should be in the region of 15 ISPs offering flat-fee dial-ups with no need for extra subscriptions or untenable terms and conditions.

However, you are still going to be penalised if you hog a dial-in port. In early February, PlusNet kicked 1,100 users off their Surftime based dial-in because they were using a port for more than 12 hours a day and/or doing so during the day despite being on a personal rather than a business tariff. The new flat-fee dial-ups should give you the freedom to use the Internet at any time, but

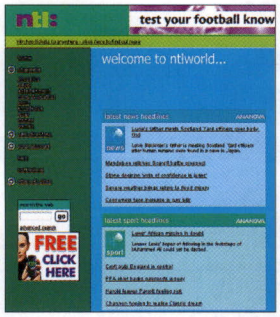
WE TEST THE MAJOR FLAT FEE PROVIDERS TO BRING YOU OUR EXCLUSIVE VERDICT

SIX OF THE BEST»

Provider	DEMON	ABEL	AOL	SNIFFOUT
				
Account Name	Demon Premier Connect Plus + BT Anytime	Abel Dial Anytime	AOL Flat Rate	Open Road Smarttime
URL	***www.demon.net***	***www.abel.co.uk***	***www.aol.co.uk***	***www.sniffout.net***
Monthly Fee	£19.99 Demon + £19.99 BT	£27.99	£14.99	£13.99
Description	Top of the range dial-up with static Net addresses and 24/7 free calls when combined with BT Anytime	Professional dial-up accounts with a choice of over 450 domain endings and 50Mb Web space	Access to the AOL global community, parental controls and unlimited freephone member support	24-hour unmetered Internet access. No hidden charges, no lengthy contract
Support Availability	24/7	0900-2300 7 days	24/7	24/7
Phone No	0800 027 9200	0906 680 4444	0800 376 5432	0845 458 2356
Support Charge	Local	25p/Minute	Free	Local
Rating	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
Verdict	Looks like being the best flat fee service in the UK. Demon comes at a price, but we found the connection speed to be extremely consistent and it was possible to get online first time. Extra technical benefits make this a great package.	Abel's peak time seems to be around 4pm and connection got a bit tricky around this time, but it was otherwise consistent. Abel aren't high-profile, but they are an established and trustworthy ISP.	Getting connected with AOL was difficult – we found the number unavailable on a number of occasions. That said, excellent technical support takes care of most problems and you get the usual top-of-the range AOL content package, too.	Connection speeds were extremely consistent, though we had some initial teething problems with this shopping portal. Expect service to improve dramatically as new systems are put in place.

they never will be permanently-on connections.

Above all there's now an air of reality about the flat-fee dial-ups. With so many ISPs having gone to the wall (Redhotant, Ezesurf etc) backers are making ISPs look at their financial viability. To this end it's refreshing to see companies like NGUK limit their flat fee service (£25 a month 24/7) to an initial 2,500 users. That means they can grow their business slowly without irritating existing subscribers with engaged tones and poor Net access.



By April, 15 ISPs should be offering flat-fee dial-up deals

By April many ISPs will offer FRIACO (Flat Rate Internet Access Call Origination) based dial-ups. This will in turn sound the death-knell for the ill-conceived Surftime system in which customers paid £19 a month to BT and about £5 to an ISP for 24/7 access. FRIACO means the money will go to the ISP and should cost about £10 a month less.

In the meantime, we set up accounts with six of the best packages and tested their service over the course of a week, connecting on a regular basis to rate them for how easily users can dial up and how the modem speed measures up. Freeserve were unable to provide an account at short notice for us to test, while the other major ISP offering flat-fee access – ntlworld – won't have their service ready for a while yet. See ***www.ntlworld.com*** for information.

AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO UNMETERED ACCESS

WHAT IT ALL MEANS»

There is a select band of Internet users in this country who are enjoying unmetered access. This is brought to their homes by cable, ADSL or leased line. Unmetered internet access, however it reaches your computer, means that you never have to worry about dialling up to the Internet because it's always there, like an everyday electricity or water supply.

There's some debate about which of the unmetered options is best, but most people have to choose the service that is available near their homes or offices. Cable connections typically offer a downstream bandwidth cap of 512kb and an upstream bandwidth cap of 128k. ADSL meanwhile offers between 256 and 512k upstream (depending upon the ISP) and 256 downstream.

Leased lines are the most expensive as this an Internet pipe installed especially for you – about £5,000 a year for a 64k line.

There are plenty of new unmetered services in development and there's no doubt that one day every home in the UK will have unmetered Net access. New satellite services, a wireless system and even Internet by power cable are just around the corner.

	NGUK	BTINTERNET
	24/7@NGUK	BTinternet Anytime
	www.nguk.net	***www.btinternet.com***
	£25	£14.99
	NGUK is a'gaming ISP' giving access to a range of multiplayer games servers and 0800 Net access	A new package that gives you access to the Web at any time for a fixed monthly fee
	n/a	24/7
	n/a – contact ***chat@nguk.net***	0906 302 3456
	By email or IRC chat	50p/Minute
	★★★	★★★
	NGUK's main drawback is its lack of phone support – email isn't much use if you can't get online. Generally, connection was acceptable, albeit a bit slow at busy periods, but if you're a gamer you'll love the	BT proved difficult to access at first, but maintained a consistent speed at all times thereafter. As brand names go, you can't get better – customer service and support are excellent.

Net Basics
The Internet in Focus
ISP Directory

Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

The ISP Directory features over 100 key facts and pricing information for nearly 200 UK ISPs including every industry leader.

For further info, visit:
www.netbasics.com

Net Basics™
The Internet in Focus

NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
info@netbasics.com
Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

Getting started

Surf the Web

SIMPLE, THIS. YOU NEED A computer (commonly a PC running Microsoft Windows, but some people use strange things called Apple Macintoshes), a means of connecting to the Internet (a modem device usually built into the computer, plus an account to dial in to) and a means of seeing the Web pages (that's a browser).

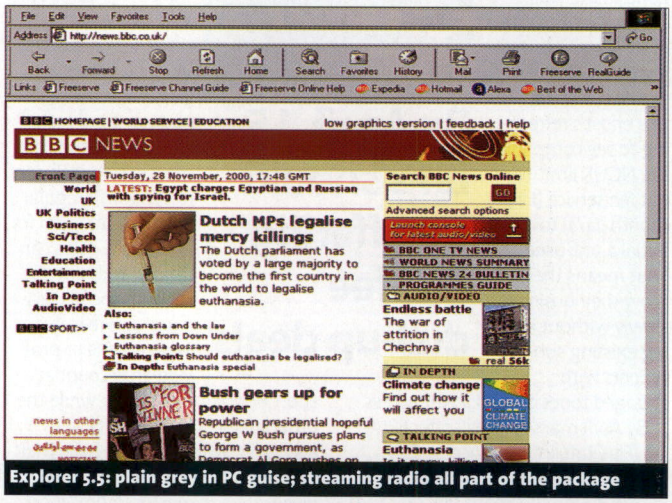
BROWSERS Usually free of charge and pre-installed on new PCs. If not, you can download one from the Internet (use your employer's network; it'll be cheaper and quicker) or from a CD (you'll find them in magazines like this one). Current champion is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***), but lagging not far behind is Netscape's reliable, adaptable and recently much-improved Navigator (***home.netscape.com/uk/download***). However, there are many 'rebel' browsers either designed for a specific computing platform or boasting strength at a particular function (see below).

NET CONNECTION Most modern PCs come with a built-in modem, a device that will dial your Internet Service Provider (see p114) and connect you to the Internet. Most modems these days run at 56K; OK, but hardly rapid fire. If you want to go quicker, you'll need to look at either 64K/128K ISDN, eg BT's Home Highway, or else 10Mbps ADSL (a permanent, zip-quick connection; for details see ***www.btopenworld.com***). Remember that most ISPs charge for connection, either in the form of a fixed fee (say £9.99 a month) or on a pay-as-you-go basis (say 1p a minute). Consider at what times you surf most and exactly how much before choosing your tariff.

YOUR COMPUTER Virtually every modern PC is quick enough to handle the software required to surf the Internet. Your only choice really is platform: while most plump for PCs running Microsoft Windows, recent years have seen a resurgence in the fortunes of the Apple Mac (mostly thanks to the cutesy iMac). Needless to say, new Internet software is written for PC first, Mac some time after – and the huge and growing online gaming industry is virtually built around PC.

£ SAVING TIPS

Many Internet applications, such as the Opera web browser, are listed as Adware. What this means is that you get the program for nothing, but have to view adverts at the top of the application. Since these are little different to standard web adverts, they usually don't detract from the program at all.



Explorer 5.5: plain grey in PC guise; streaming radio all part of the package

New Netscape 6: colourful, funky; AOL Instant Messenger built in

THERE'S MORE TO BROWSERS THAN EXPLORER AND NETSCAPE

BROWSER ALTERNATIVES»

BROWSER	RATING	FOR	AGAINST	DOWNLOAD FROM
PC BROWSERS				
AMAYA	★★☆☆☆	Great for those into Net standards...	...not for those who aren't	*www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html*
ARACHNE	★★☆☆☆	It runs in DOS and is written by Czechs	A pain to set up	*arachne.cz*
CUSTOM BROWSER	★☆☆☆☆	Adds minimal extra customisation to IE	It's just IE with an ad in the top panel	*www.custombrowser.com*
HOTJAVA	★★☆☆☆	Pretty showcase for Java technology	Slow, though not as bad as on the Mac	*java.sun.com/products/hotjava/3.0*
INTERNET EXPLORER	★★★★★	For the moment, the king of all browsers	Hard to fault, unless you really try	*www.microsoft.com/windows/ie*
LYNX	★★★★☆	The original text-only browser	If it isn't text, Lynx isn't interested	*lynx.browser.org*
MOSAIC	★★★☆☆	Good for developers	Feels old. Is old. Not updated since 1996	*www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/mosaic-w*
NEOPLANET	★★★★☆	Funky interface replacement for Explorer	Internet Explorer in new clothes	*www.neoplanet.com*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★☆	Wide range of features for hardcore users	Doesn't display pages as prettily as IE	*www.netscape.co.uk*
OPERA	★★★★☆	Faster than IE or Netscape	Bit of a stickler for standards	*www.opera.com*
SURF MONKEY	★★★★★	Lots of fun – blowing up sites is great	'Unavailable - being upgraded'	*www.surfmonkey.com*
MAC BROWSERS				
ICAB	★★★★☆	Fast. Gets rid of irritating ad banners	Could support more features	*www.icab.de*
INTERNET EXPLORER 5.0	★★★★★	State-of-the-art browsing on the Mac	Can be memory-hungry	*www.microsoft.com/Mac/ie*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★★	Runs IE close; looks can be themed	Current test versions not as stable as IE	*www.netscape.com*

Send and receive email

EMAIL: THE STUFF THAT HAS THE Royal Mail quivering in its boots (after all, who sends letters any more?). But before you can enjoy the visceral thrills of sending mail instantly through cyberspace (80 percent of email apparently makes it to its recipient within five minutes) you'll need an address and a means of sending and receiving your post.

The former you can get either by signing up with an Internet Service Provider (or ISP, see page 114), getting one from your employer (many firms now have big networks and will afford you a name as part of the job), or through one of the web-based email service providers (such as Yahoo!, Hotmail, excite, etc). But what are the pros and cons of each option?

WEB-BASED EMAIL

Dead handy if you travel a lot; once you have your password after signing up, you can check your mail from any Internet café or any place with a Net-linked PC. Some Web-based email service providers even offer the facility to forward and send mail through such desktop software as Microsoft Outlook or Eudora. The catch? Many have a rather clumsy interface, and sending and receiving mail can be slow, especially when America wakes up in the morning and logs on. Make sure you keep a duplicate of your address book and favourites on your hard drive, otherwise if your web-based account goes down, so do all your contact details. If you fancy checking it out, you can start an account at ***www.yahoo.co.uk***, or head along to either ***www.hotmail.com*** or ***www.excite.co.uk.***

YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER

When you sign up with an ISP, you'll be given at least one email address to use, and most will even provide the email software you need to get started (usually Outlook, although do remember that you're rarely stuck with it; you can choose between the leading packages outlined in the column to the right). The catch? You may find it difficult to read email from these accounts at your workplace, unless you can be bothered to manually forward mail to yourself for the next day, that is.

YOUR EMPLOYER

This usually means using whatever software your employer provides (which is invariably the networked version of Outlook), and you can't access your email from home using your own PC (unless your bosses love you enough to set you up there as well). The upside? It's all free of charge.

£ SAVING TIPS

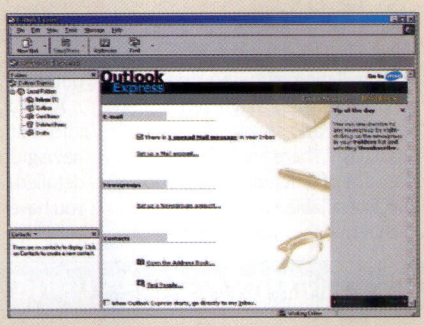
The ISP market is so crammed at the moment that it's possible to get some real bargains. Check out the news page at *www.ispreview.co.uk* for news of beta and/or introductory services. You may find you can get yourself a free dial-up account, even a 24/7 one for little or no outlay. You may be asked to enter your debit card details, but you can cancel these before the service goes live and they start charging you hard cash.

Yahoo! Mail: free email, and you can forward it to your Outlook desktop client

ARE THE RIGHT PEOPLE HANDLING YOUR POST?

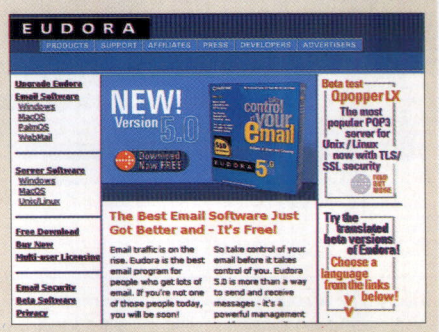
EMAIL CLIENTS>>

Microsoft Outlook Express 5 ★★★★☆



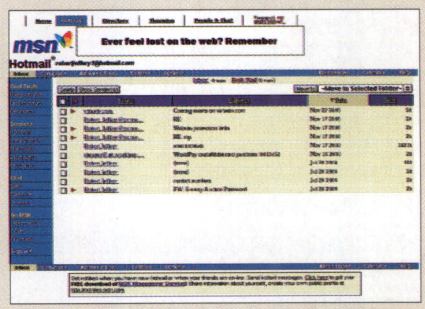
If your PC came with IE5+, you're most likely already using Express 5. And that's a good thing: the latest Outlook is easy to use and set up, and now features such useful extras as Hotmail support (you can download your Hotmail messages for working offline, or synch your Hotmail and Express address books). And with so many families now having individual email addresses, Outlook makes setting up individual accounts fuss free. Available for both PC and Mac, the download is at ***www.microsoft.com/windows/oe***.

Eudora 5.0 ★★★★★



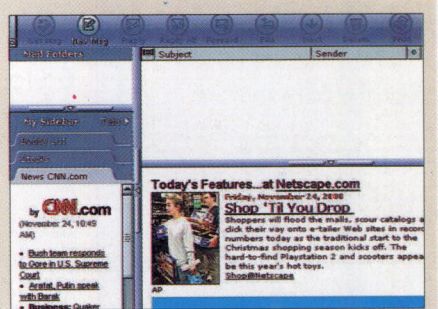
Launched back in September, the latest Eudora is available in Paid ($49.95), Sponsored and Light modes. Both of the latter can be grabbed free from ***www.eudora.com***. While Light is stripped down, Sponsored features ads (see picture, right). Either way, the Eudora package is excellent; the interface is attractive and intuitive, while the package integrates well with the address book. 5.0 even includes a novel 'MoodWatcher' – a feature than affords mail a 'red chilli pepper' rating according to the strength of its 'inflammatory' language.

MSN Hotmail ★★★★☆



The web-based service that got the whole ball rolling. Sign up for a free account, and get an email address and a password. There's a 2Mb limit on your inbox, and an Inbox Protector to fight off spam mail. The Hotmail Alert service will notify your pager or mobile telephone of incoming messages. Sign up at ***www.hotmail.com***, or try either ***www.yahoo.co.uk*** or ***www.excite.co.uk*** instead; the services are all pretty similar.

Netscape Mail ★★★★☆



Now bundled in with the new Netscape 6 browser, Mail runs Outlook Express neck-and-neck; as with the Microsoft product, there's full integration with its built-in address book. True to the philosophy of the 6 browser, the themed Mail interface tries to pack in as much 'user friendliness' as possible. The 'My Sidebar' feature, for example, is carried over from the browser, so you can keep your instant messaging buddy list in sight, and even keep an eye on the latest news.

Newsgroups

Whatever topic tickles your fancy, there'll be a newsgroup dedicated to it on the Net. Here's how to join up

Newsgroups are one of the older services on the Internet. Each group is like a bulletin board – anyone can post messages to different newsgroups, and anyone can read the postings. There are tens of thousands of different newsgroup subjects available, so there will be one that matches your interests, whether you're looking for info on beekeeping or book-keeping, computers or comics, sewing or sailing.

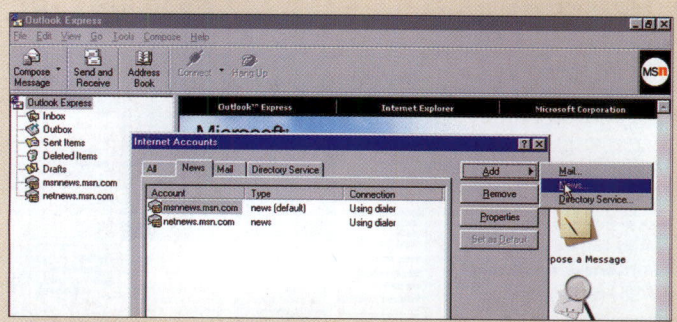
Although the Web has plenty of information on most subjects, newsgroups will often provide more detailed answers to questions. If you have a question on a specific subject, you can receive half a dozen responses in two hours. The most famous newsgroup system is Usenet. This is structured like a tree, with a few large branches and thousands of smaller ones. The large branches are top-level discussion categories, such as rec (recreation), which contain smaller branches, such as rec.art. These categories contain messages themselves but are also broken down further into even more specific branches, such as rec.arts.comics, which contain messages from people who are interested in that topic.

If you don't want to go to the bother of configuring Outlook Express or other newsgroup access software, visit DejaNews ***www.deja.com*** – a Web-based interface to newsgroups. You can read and send messages from here, all via your Web browser. Simple.

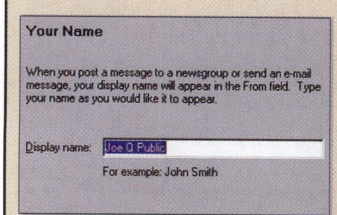
Your ISP will provide you with its own news server access, or visit ***esalesbiz.com/web/nntplst.htm*** which links to hundreds of free access news servers. To add more servers to Outlook Express, go through the setting-up steps outlined below.

ACCESSING NEWSGROUPS USING OUTLOOK EXPRESS

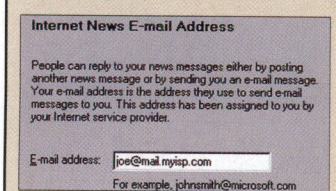
STEP BY STEP>>



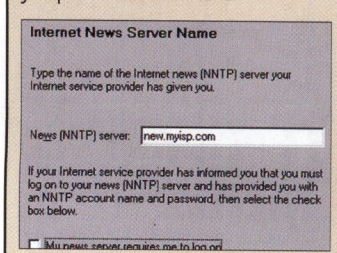
1 Go to the Accounts entry in the Tools menu, click on the News tab to list your current news accounts (if any), hit Add and choose News.



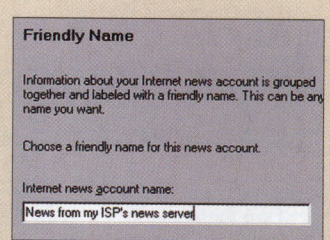
2 Type in your name. This will be displayed in any message you post to a newsgroup. Then hit Next.



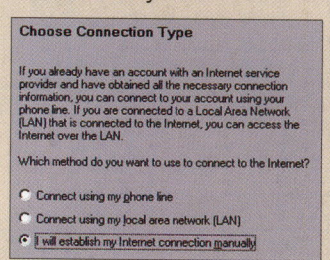
3 Type in your email address. This will be displayed in any message you post. Then click Next.



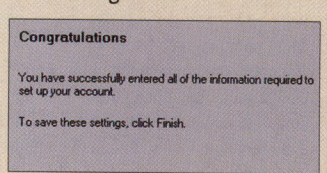
4 Enter the name of your ISP's server which should be given in your user documentation.



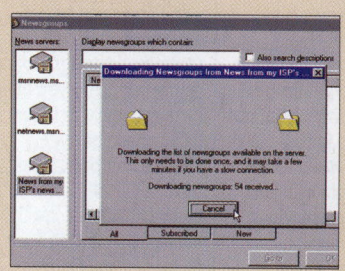
5 Give the news server a name that makes sense to you.



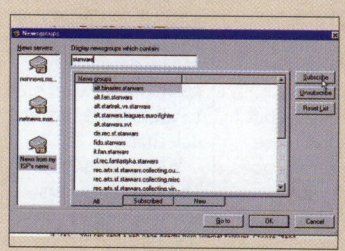
6 Tell Outlook Express that you will dial your ISP manually before you start reading news.



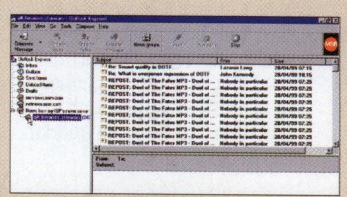
7 And you're done! You have now set up a newsgroup access account. Now let's see how to use it.



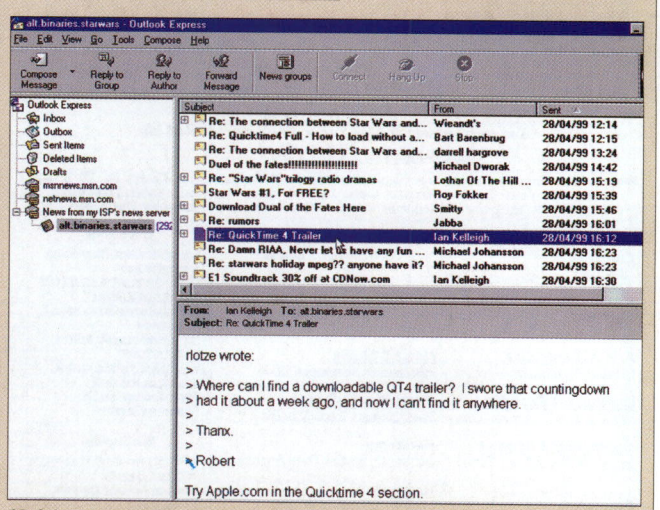
8 After hitting Close, you're asked if you want to download your ISP's list of newsgroups. When you click Yes, the list will be downloaded, so make sure you're online. This can take up to 10 minutes when you first connect, because you are downloading the names of thousands of newsgroups.



9 Once all the newsgroups are downloaded, you can explore. If you want to find *Star Wars* postings, for example, type 'starwars' into the text field at the top of the window to display all newsgroups containing that word. You can subscribe to as many groups as you want.



10 To access a message inside a newsgroup, click on the subject header to read a summary. Double click the header and the whole message downloads, appearing on the lower half of the screen.



11 If there is a '+' sign by the message header this means there are replies which you can also read. Click on the '+' sign to see the list of replies.

Online chat

How to hold virtual conversations with friends and strangers, experts and celebrities

Online chat lets you communicate with other people, often in real time. In other words, you type in comments, send them over the Net and they're seen almost immediately. And you're only paying for a local phone call, even if you are 'talking' to someone on the other side of the world.

You can 'chat' with friends and relatives in other countries without running up massive phone bills. Or join in an online discussion on your favourite subject with an expert.

There's the opportunity to ask a celebrity questions during a moderated 'conference', or talk to complete strangers on the other side of the world.

'Smileys' are a way of including an indication of emotion in your messages. They are useful when, for example, you are making a joke and you want to be sure that the recipient realises you're not being serious. Hang a relevant smiley on the end of your sentence by typing in the relevant characters, but do try not to over-use them. To 'read' them, just turn the page 90 degrees to the left ;-) got it? Here are the four most used smileys:

- :-) The original smiley. Indicates a joke, or just a happy person!
- ;-) Wink
- :-o Shock (an open mouth)
- :-(Unhappy

Don't register your details with a site unless you really want to. Often chat software will ask for your name and other info. Be wary; you don't know what it'll be used for.

If you are looking for romance online, use caution. Don't reveal your home address and if you decide to meet up, make sure someone knows where you're going, as you would if meeting someone from a magazine or newspaper ad.

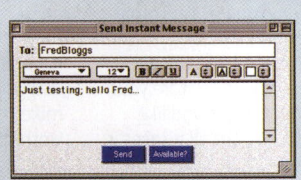
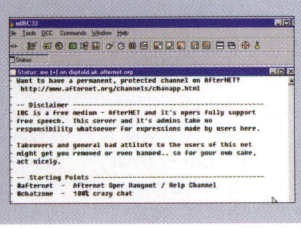
If text chat seems a bit flat, try 3D chat, where users take on a 'persona' and actually walk round chat rooms. Try ***www.virtualzones.com*** for starters.

£ SAVING TIPS

Save time while you're chatting online by using popular Internet abbreviations, like FYI (for your information), L (laughing), LOL (laughing out loud) and IMHO (in my humble opinion). For more examples, visit *tqjunior.thinkquest.org/4658/chat.htm*

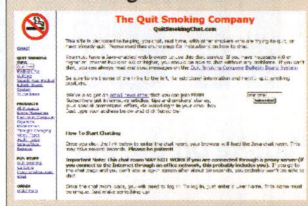
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD...

CHAT CHOICES>>

TYPE OF CHAT		FOR & AGAINST	CHAT LINK
LIVE ON A WEB SITE Takes place within the window of your browser on a Web site. Messages come up instantly and can be seen by everyone who is viewing that Web page.		**FOR** Easy to use; no extra software required to run it. **AGAINST** Works on someone's Web site, so the subject will be dictated by them and private chat is unlikely.	***www.talkcity.com*** Online community where you can talk on various subjects, including romance and current affairs.
MODERATED SESSIONS Moderated chats are 'supervised' by a chat room host, who decides whether or not to allow your comments or questions to be displayed. This is the norm for celebrity chats.		**FOR** Discussions are sensibly run. Abusive or annoying people may be screened out. **AGAINST** Only take place at certain times because they require a moderator to be present on the site. Censorship.	***www.chat.beeb.com*** The BBC's celebrity chat service with daily visits from the network's top stars.
REAL-TIME USING EXTRA SOFTWARE Software like AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ allow you to chat in real time. You don't use a Web browser; the software takes care of everything.		**FOR** Instant response; ability to chat privately to one person. **AGAINST** Requires extra software. Some firms don't allow this to be installed on their PCs, so you may not be able to chat at work.	***www.aol.co.uk/aim*** ***www.icq.com*** Chat one-to-one with your friends in real time on the Net.
IRC IRC (Internet Relay Chat) software lets you talk to many people at once. It can be a pain to use, however; it was, after all, modelled on CB radio.		**FOR** Useful, technical chats are often held on IRC channels. **AGAINST** Software is difficult to use; IRC users can be impatient with newcomers.	***www.mirc.com*** Although it can be tricky to get used to, mIRC is the best software for IRC chat. ***www.ircle.com*** IRC client for Macs.

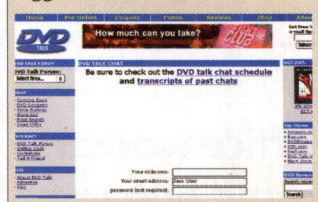
RELATED CHAT SITES

Explore some of the subjects featured in this month's *the net* further through chat rooms...



Gasping for a ciggie? Pay a visit to ***www.quitsmokingchat.com*** and share your addiction pains.

You'll find Gamblers Anonymous chat channels on most of the bigger IRC servers.



Share your passion for DVDs with other home cinema fans at ***www.dvdtalk.com***.

Can't find that elusive MP3? Maybe the folks at ***www.musicchatroom.com*** can help.

It's not exactly MI6, but ***www.journalismnet.com/spy/spychat.htm*** is as close as mere mortals will get.

Find the love of your life or play cruel pranks on work colleagues at ***www.singles-online.net***.

TESTED WEBMAIL SERVICES

Travellers' mails

If you're on the move, or just don't like relying on one ISP, our Webmail round-up will show you the way

LIKE SO MANY OF THE MOST successful concepts on the Internet, Webmail was an idea that was just waiting to happen. Email had revolutionised everyone's lives but it tied you mercilessly to a particular ISP. If you changed your ISP you nearly always had to change your email address too. This led to the 20th century equivalent of 'We've moved house' cards – the 'my email address has changed' email. It was a far from satisfactory state of affairs.

Because Webmail is based entirely on the Internet it freed everyone from the shackles of ISP-specific email. It meant you could have the same address all the time, no matter who you dialled up to the Net with.

Office workers could engage in idle chit-chat in safety once more

The advantages of Webmail accounts stretches beyond their stability, however. With a Webmail account, you can check your email wherever there's a PC with a Web browser and an Internet connection. Many people sign up with Webmail providers for the simple reason that they like to stay in touch with people when they're on holiday or away from their home PC. Moreover, Webmail has made it possible for casual PC users (such as people who only have access to the Internet in a cybercafe) to have an email account.

Office workers, too, were quick to grasp the advantages of Webmail. Here was a way for them to have an active email account, which they could access at work, and to which their bosses had no access or control over. It meant that they could indulge in idle chit-chat in safety.

With new Webmail providers springing up all the time, it's difficult knowing where to start – so we've run through the biggest sites out there, and tested the rest.

HOTMAIL

www.hotmail.com ★★★★

It's the biggest, but does that mean it's the best too?

IT WAS FIRST AND IT'S THE MOST popular by a staggering margin. That does not mean, however, that Hotmail is the best. Perhaps the biggest question mark hanging over Hotmail's head is its reliability: in January, the entire service went down when a backroom techie messed up some crucial routers. The bottom line was that, for over a day, not one of the millions of subscribers could read their email.

Hotmail is free and is geared towards use in public areas such as cybercafes. When you click the sign-out button it flushes the Web browser's cache so nobody can read your intimate correspondence after you've finished with the machine. It also features an Inbox Protector facility which is designed to stop junk mail from reaching your main correspondence directory. We also liked the facility to check your POP3 email (handy if you want to see what's been sent to you when you're on holiday) and the automatic virus protection.

On the downside, you only get 2Mb of space in which to store your email. That might not sound like much of a problem, but all it takes is a few important emails with attachments and you've exceeded your allotted space. If you're looking for an email account to use for work then you'd be advised to look elsewhere or you'll find important emails in the wastebin instead of your inbox.

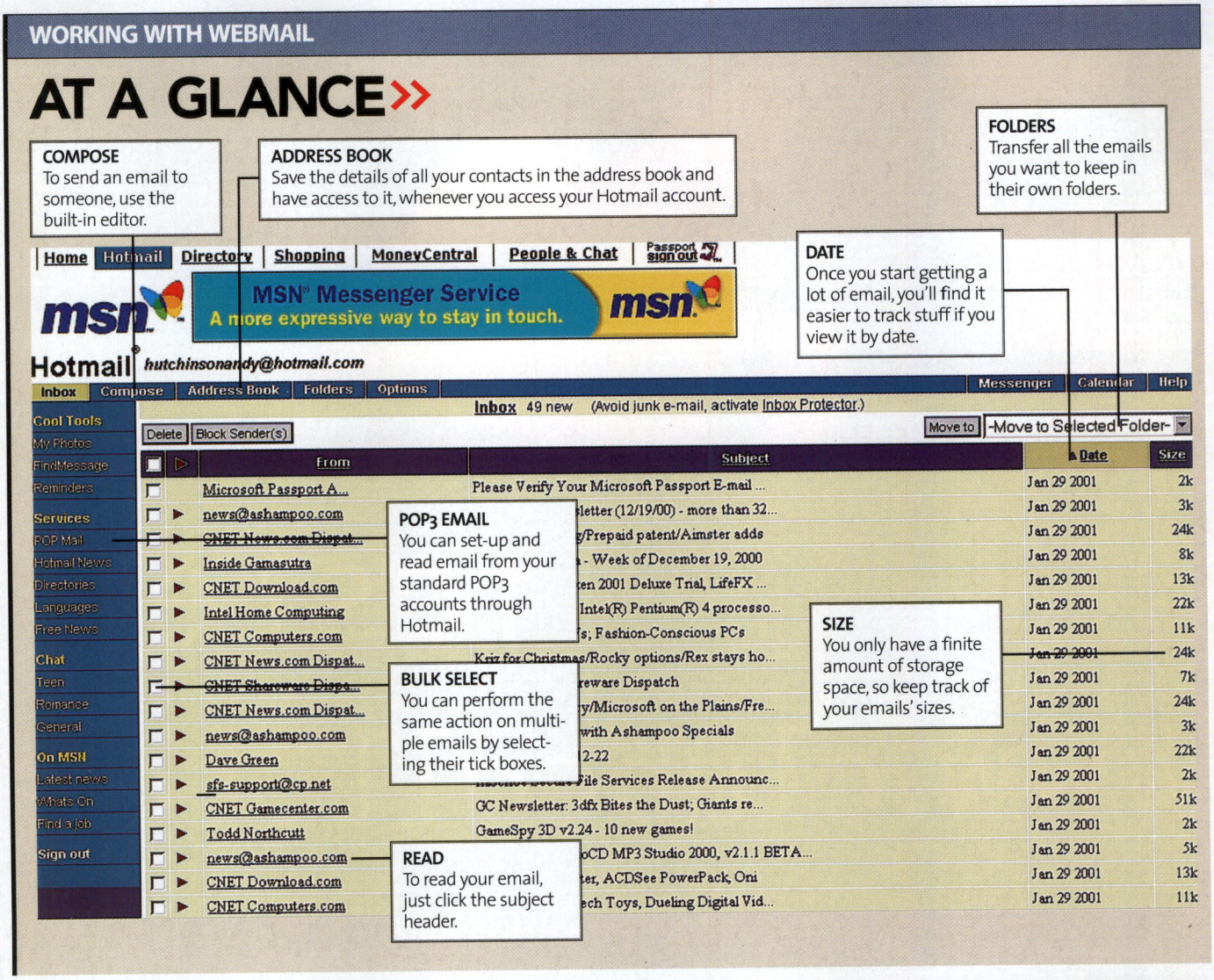
Frequent emailers will have a problem, but infrequent users will too. If you don't access your Hotmail account for 60 days, the nice people at Microsoft suspend it. If, after a further 30 days you still don't check your email, it gets deleted. Not a huge problem for most people, but worth remembering if you plan to travel the world.

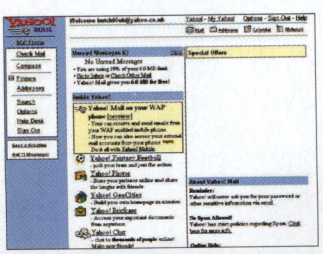
Anyone who's tried to set up a Hotmail account recently will know that the biggest problem is finding a meaningful name. As you can imagine, with 76million subscribers, all the good ones have gone. Not only that, but all the average ones have too. You'll undoubtedly end up with an email address such as mike7742jones@hotmail.com. As Hotmail uses standard SSL encryption, it's not as secure as some other Webmail services, but if all you're doing is chatting about the weather to relations in Australia then that won't be an issue for you.

There's undoubtedly going to be a shakedown in the Webmail market, as with the Web in general, with some providers going to the wall. However, with such a massive subscriber base, and the backing of the mighty Microsoft, Hotmail won't be one of them.

WORKING WITH WEBMAIL

AT A GLANCE»





YAHOO!

mail.yahoo.com ★★★★

You know the directory, but have you tried the mail yet?

Undoubtedly because they're such a well known Internet brand, Yahoo! was one of the first companies to join Hotmail in offering a Webmail service. There aren't any hard and fast figures out there, but it's safe to assume that several million people are now receiving their email through the Yahoo! mail system.

On the face of it, Yahoo! Mail looks very ordinary, but dig a little deeper and you can turn up most of the features the other Webmail providers make available. We found Yahoo! extremely easy to use – in fact, if you're looking for a good 'starter' account for someone, this is the one we'd recommend, so get all those grannies and cousins signed up today.

Like all the Webmail services in this round-up, Yahoo! is free and can be accessed anywhere there's a computer with an Internet connection and a browser. It's also offered in a staggering variety of languages (much like the Yahoo! directory itself), whereas Hotmail's offered in a meagre eight dialects. If you're keen on getting email as quickly as possible, it's worth getting your friends to sign up with Yahoo! too, as email travels far quicker if it doesn't have to leave the system.

We've already mentioned the extremely limited 2Mb of storage space that Hotmail offer. The good news is that Yahoo! will let you play with three times that amount – a very nifty 6Mb. Now admittedly that's still a pretty small amount of space, but as long as you remember to delete any email that comes with attachments, you could keep a fairly large archive of old mail. The service also comes with customisable signatures, automatic vacation response emails, address blocking, mail sorting and mail forwarding.

Yahoo! have an Instant Messaging product – Yahoo! Messenger – which enables you to talk in real-time to friends. If you install this, it will notify you when you've got some mail waiting for you in your inbox, which niftily sidesteps one of the biggest problems with Webmail – namely that you have to keep manually checking your account to see if there's anything waiting for you.

Unlike Hotmail, Yahoo has never crashed, depriving users of access to their email. That doesn't mean it won't, of course. Apart from that, this is a premium service – if you're looking for a plain vanilla email account and you don't want to follow the herd to Microsoft's door then Yahoo! Mail is definitely worth looking at.

HUSHMAIL

www.hushmail.com ★★★★★

The Webmail provider where safety is all-important

If you've read Richard Tomlinson's book *The Big Breach*, then you'll know email is a long way from being secure. Both the Americans and the larger European nations (UK, Germany, France etc) have access to private email via Echelon (which monitors all electronic correspondence that crosses the Atlantic) and Carnivore, which is an American-based email interception computer system. »

Image supplied by Action Images.

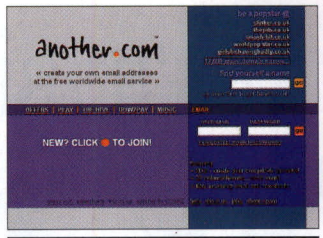
You may take the view that you're not sending any salacious material via email and that the FBI and MI6 are welcome to read your emails. However, you may feel that it's an almighty intrusion on your personal rights and that the powers-that-be have no right to go rifling through your inbox. If you fall into the latter camp or if you consider yourself a target for government surveillance then this unique service should be your first choice.

Hushmail is the first totally secure Webmail service. It uses a 128-bit symmetric block cipher called Blowfish to encrypt your unique password before it's even sent to the Web server, which means there's no record of it anywhere. The only thing that can decrypt the private key is your Hushmail password combined with the Blowfish algorithm. Combine all that with 1024bit security and you've got a system that no government super computer, no matter how capable, will ever hack. And it even encrypts attachments, too.

There are so many neat touches to Hushmail that it's become a firm favourite with Internet users all over the globe. It has an extremely simple interface that anyone, beginner or expert, can use. You can create your own username or Hush will randomly generate one for you, in which case you don't have to enter any personal information at all. And of course, like Hotmail, Yahoo and Another, it's completely free.

You may feel the FBI are very welcome to read your emails

There's very little wrong with Hushmail, even though it's still officially in beta testing stage. It's only available in English, German and French at the moment and only works on PCs for the time being, but further languages and platforms are promised when Hushmail is officially launched. It comes highly recommended.



ANOTHER.COM

www.another.com ★★★

Choose a name to suit your mood with this unique service

We've already touched on the advantages of having a Webmail account so you can access private email while you're at work. But what if you'd like such an account for work purposes? After all, Brian34223@hotmail.com isn't the most professional looking email address – but what about brian@media-guru.co.uk? The solution is Another.com, which adds the personal touch to Webmail.

Another.com started life as Funmail.com – the idea being to bring a bit of life to the torpid world of Web email where everyone is @thesameaddress.com. Sign up with another.com and not only can you have a slightly more meaningful name, but you can have up to 20 .

Another.com is one of those rarities – a UK company that looks like it could compete on the world stage. The number of URLs that they've registered is simply staggering – if you can't find an email address you like from the 12,000 they own, you should go back to snailmail.

Just because Another.com has a unique twist on the whole Webmail service doesn't mean they're somehow lacking in important areas – far from it. Their email checking service is every bit as easy to use as Yahoo!'s and Hushmail's, because all email, no matter which identity you're using, is directed to one inbox.

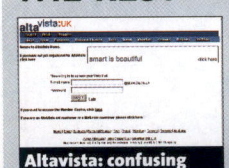
On a less positive note, Another.com lacks some of the bells and whistles of the other email providers. The most obvious missing feature is the lack of a mail responder that lets you know when you have email waiting. It's a very neat service, however, especially if the idea of multiple email addresses appeals to you. Just remember not to send an email to your boss using the colditz.co.uk or slaphead.co.uk.

YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO WEBMAIL PROVIDERS

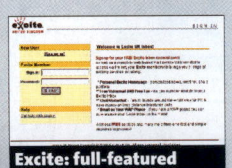
THE MAIN CONTENDERS>>

NAME	URL	WEB SPACE	DELETION	SECURITY	POP3 FACILITY
ANOTHER	www.another.com	10Mb	not specified	Uses industry standard encryption	No
Use up to 20 unique email addresses – but there's no POP3 support yet ★★★					
HOTMAIL	www.hotmail.com	2Mb	90 days	*Uses the same SSL security that e-commerce sites employ*	Yes
The first ever Webmail service is starting to suffer from over-popularity ★★★★					
HUSHMAIL	www.hushmail.com	6Mb	not specified	*Uses exceptionally secure 1024bit encryption*	Yes
Totally secure email service keeps your correspondence private ★★★★★					
YAHOO	mail.yahoo.com	6Mb	not specified	Uses SSL encryption along with a rigid privacy policy	Yes
Nice and simple to use and surprisingly feature-packed ★★★★					

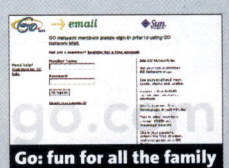
THE REST>>



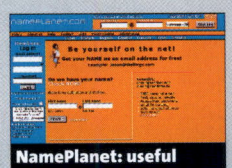
Altavista: confusing



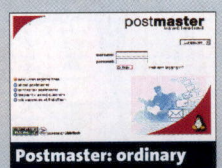
Excite: full-featured



Go: fun for all the family



NamePlanet: useful



Postmaster: ordinary

Talk21: versatile

NAME	URL	WEB SPACE	DELETION	SECURITY	POP3 FACILITY
ALTAVISTA	uk.altavista.com/email.jsp	5Mb	not specified	Standard Web encryption and a standard privacy policy	No
Confusing site offering a very ordinary range of Webmail services ★★★					
EXCITE	www.excite.co.uk	3Mb	120 days	Good security along with firewall protection at their end	Yes
Full-featured Webmail service that comes complete with free voicemail service ★★★★					
GO MAIL	www.infoseek.com	3Mb	90 days	Standard Web security plus initial web identity verification	Yes
Geared nicely towards kids as well as adults – also offers a unique family membership ★★★					
NAMEPLANET	www.nameplanet.com	5Mb	90 days	The usual password security plus and auto log-out	Yes
Register your name john@smith.net without splashing out on a domain ★★★★					
POSTMASTER	www.postmaster.co.uk	not specified	90 days	Standard Web security and password protected accounts	No
British service offering a fairly ordinary range of Webmail services ★★★					
TALK21	www.talk21.co.uk	5Mb	not specified	Standard Web security and privacy policy	Yes
Staggeringly versatile – you can even have email read to you down the phone ★★★★★					

PICTURES: PA

Make your site a media

Nobody could accuse Microsoft of missing an opportunity to dominate a market. They set the default page of Internet Explorer to MSN.com knowing full well that most people wouldn't change it.

The MSN.com page is now the busiest portal on the Internet. Portals are entry pages, doorways to content on the Internet through which you pass en route to your usual Web sites. They always offer new content and so, in Web parlance, are 'sticky' – sites you'll want to return to so often that you'll probably set one as your homepage.

What you might be unaware of is that anyone can create their own portal and have visitors returning again and again. Better still, you don't actually have to originate much of the content yourself; you can add plenty of interesting material to your page for absolutely nothing. Moreover, it's created by organisations as respected as the Associated Press and *The Guardian*.

Incredibly, one Web site (***www.isyndicate.com***) alone lists over 4,700 different 'feeds' you can add to your page. Whatever your tastes and those of your target audience, you can virtually guarantee that there's a free, updated source of syndicated information out there, just waiting for you to add it to your page.

With companies as big as 20th Century Fox producing syndicated material, you have to wonder just what's in it for them. The answer, as always, is traffic. The feeds you include in your site are branded by the originator and the actual material remains on their server. In effect, when someone clicks on a link, they're viewing a third party site through your Web page.

Bear in mind, though, that the more syndicated items you have on your Web page, the greater the risk of slow loading; and there may be adverts, to boot. Moreover, too much syndicated material and the off-site links will leech your readers. It's all a question of balance.

Somewhat amazingly, the odd provider will actually pay you for click-throughs resulting from the inclusion of their material on your site. Don't expect to make a million, though; we're talking a matter of pennies per lead. Pay a visit to ***www.cartoonlink.net***, for instance, and you'll find an affiliate program which pays you $2 for every print they sell through your site.

Perhaps the main consideration is the relevance of the material to your site. Don't go crazy and include reams of pointless features just because you can. Target your sources well and you'll add considerably to the viability of your home page.

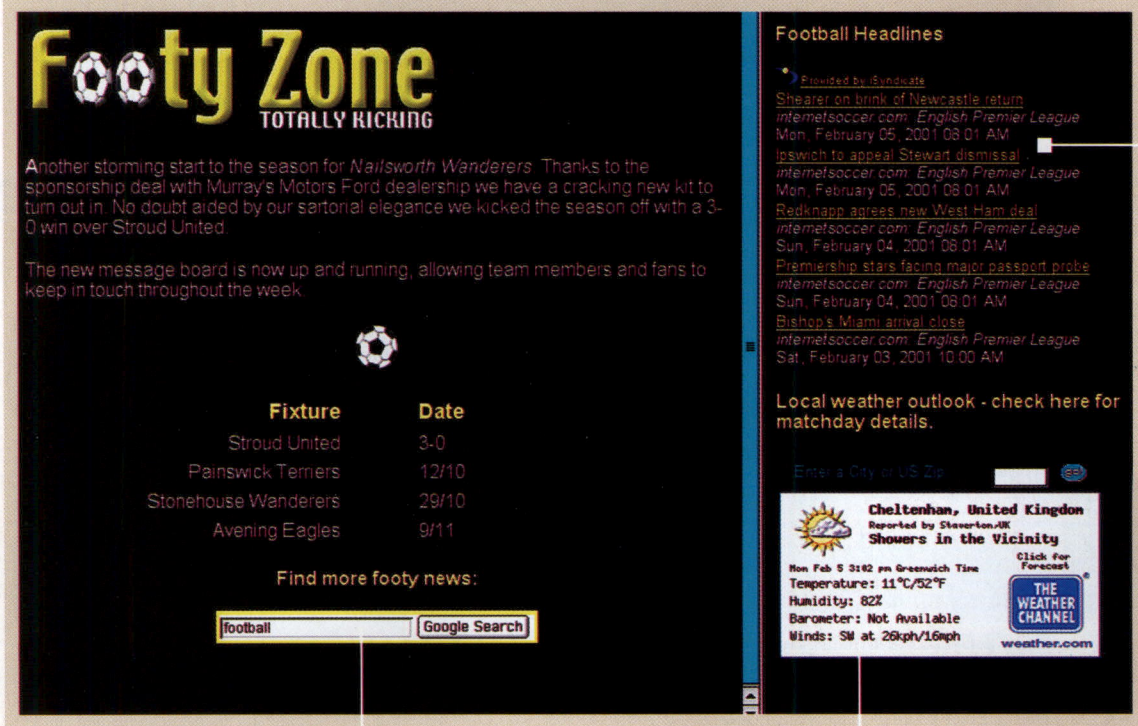
The Net is now, and always will be, a buyers' market. If you run a

giant

Adding extra content to your site doesn't have to take time or cost a fortune. From *Rolling Stone* to *The Guardian*, companies are desperate to write for you – here's how to get them working

PORTALS IN ACTION

Here's one we made earlier »



ISYNDICATE FOOTBALL HEADLINES

There's a staggering amount of material available on the iSyndicate Web site, including some excellent specific content. We found this football feed in its general sports section. The size of the feed was tailored to suit our requirements and the colours altered to fit in with the rest of the sight. The end result is very professional.

GOOGLE SEARCH

As everyone knows, the finest search engine is Google. You can harness Google's awesome powers for you own Web site, bringing a search window to the heart of your home page. Point your Web browser at ***www.google.com*** and click on the 'Add Google to Your Site' button at the bottom of the screen. Now click on the 'Free Search' option and fill in your details. You can now modify the Google search bar so that it fits in with the rest of your site. Then, when you're happy, you can cut and paste the code with which they kindly supply you into your site.

WEATHER CHANNEL MAGNET

It doesn't broadcast over here any more, but the Weather Channel still produces some great localised Internet content. You can get a Weather Channel Magnet like ours by pointing your browser at ***oap.weather.com/oap/index.html***. Just fill in your local details, ie country, city, and then insert the code that it supplies into your home page.

successful Web site, you have a valuable resource to offer the people who run these affiliate and syndicate programs: Internet surfers. In return they'll give you news headlines (national and international); weather bulletins; business, money, health, entertainment, sports, and science and reference features.

To include these on your Web pages, you usually have to register with a specific site. You can then pick the syndicated material you'd like to include on your home page. When you've selected the headlines or features you want, you're given a snippet of code to paste into your site. You can then upload your page to your server and you'll find the material ready and waiting.

Actually adding the material to your Web site is perhaps the only area where there's a possibility of running into trouble. You won't go wrong as long as you copy the exact code and paste it, in its entirety, into the appropriate position on your Web page. If you've always used a WYSIWYG HTML program, such as Dreamweaver, then just position the cursor where you'd like the news feed placed, enter your application's source view and paste the code in.

SPORTY CONTENT

Whether it's a site dedicated to your Sunday league team, a Denver Broncos fan site or an expert's guide to snowboarding, there's plenty of excellent sports-related material you can add to your site. As with much syndicated material, there's a heavy US bias to the material on offer, but have a good look around and you'll soon turn up some gems.

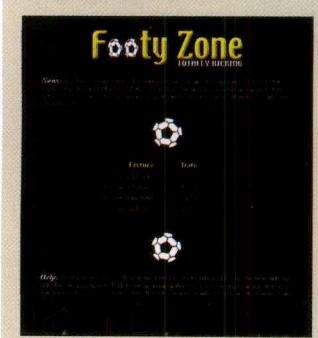
Starting with news, Anorak's news feeds are a great feature on any Web site. The Anorak team (***www.anorak.co.uk***) casts a wryly jaundiced eye over the material produced by the national press, producing some amusingly caustic material. Guardian Unlimited's sports feed is first rate, offering not only news headlines, but also minute-by-minute cricket and football score updates, and a range of material produced by the *The Guardian* team specifically for the Internet. If horses are your thing, then be sure to try the Associated Press's excellent horse racing feed. All three feeds are available from iSyndicate: find them at ***uk.isyndicate.com/providers/cplist.html***.

So we've got the news covered. How about something a little bit different? MyVal has created a superb Web-based football game called Hunchbacker (***www.myval.com/hunchbacker***) that makes some of the full blown management simulations look positively weak by comparison. Hunchbacker is a game of prediction in which players make educated guesses about the outcome of matches in a variety of leagues, including the UK Premiership and the Italian Serie A. As long as you're prepared to put up with a bit of advertising, you can include Hunchbacker on your Web site absolutely free of charge.

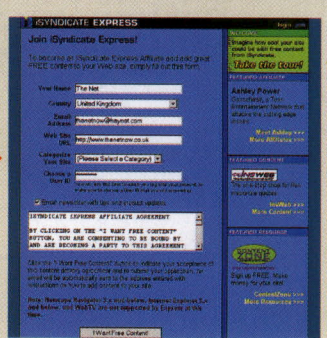
Formula 1 fans will enjoy The Sports Network news and feature feed (an iSyndicate feed) which keeps you up-to-date on all the teams and drivers . Golf fans can tap into the Associated Press's or The Sports Network's superb feeds. Rugby enthusiasts would be advised to check out Moreover's excellent

A NEW FEED IN EIGHT STEPS

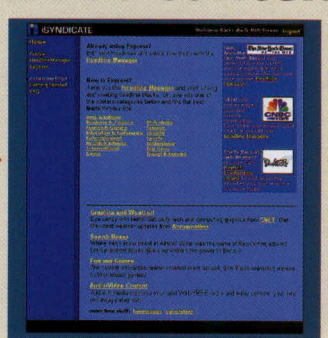
How to build in someone else's content »



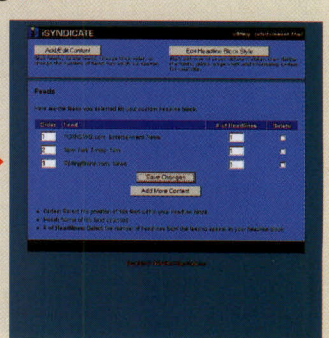
1 There are millions of Web pages out there and unless you're offering something very unique, you'll be hard pushed to get people to visit your site. However, even if you're happy with a small audience, there's no reason not to add interesting 'sticky' features to your site. Here we have a site run by the captain of a Sunday League football team. He's got his site up and running, he has the fixtures in place, but even for the people it's targeted at, it's a soulless experience.



2 iSyndicate is the biggest source of affiliate material on the Internet and so we'll use it as an example. Before you can incorporate some of the data that iSyndicate has on its books you need to register. This is so you can keep track of exactly what you've included on your site and they can track you (you think they're doing this for charitable reasons?). Once you've chosen your User ID, they'll send you your password by email and you can then log-in.



3 This is the main iSyndicate page, from where we can choose what kind of content we want to add to our page. There are several ways to do this. You can use the pre-built headlines that iSyndicate has kindly come up with, or you can pick out each individual feature that you'd like to include. Both options are fairly flexible, so it might be an idea to try iSyndicate's pre-built options first and then move onto the more personalised approach after you're comfortable with the concept.



4 The headline blocks fall into five broad categories: business, entertainment, news, and sports and technology. We're going to modify the entertainment block so that we get something a little bit more left-field than the three conservative offerings (FoxNews, *New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*) that are listed as standard. To do this, click the Add More Content button and choose the feed you want from the large list that's on offer.

rugby feed which includes headlines from the BBC, Sky and scrum.com. To find them, go to ***www.moreover.com***, click News Portal and select Sport as a category. And, just in case you want to cater to people who voted George Bush's son in, check out the Hunting and Fishing feed from Scripps Howard (iSyndicate).

TRAVEL

There are certain TV shows that will always have an audience – cooking and gardening, for example – but there will always be room for travel shows, too. And it's no different on the Internet, a medium that's ideal for researching holiday ideas or just whiling away the hours dreaming about exotic locations.

The fast-moving world of sports lends itself well to news headlines, but travel's a far more sedate world and this is echoed by the style and content of travel feeds. Having said that, the Culture, Adventure & Entertainment feed (iSyndicate, registered members only) has much going for it. Updated weekly, it brings a cool perspective to travelling (Disneyworld in Florida from an adult's point of view being a case in point) and manages to avoid the cheesy sentimentality that pervades many of the alternative travel information sources.

If you're looking to attract a global audience to your Web site, then we can heartily recommend Travelwire UK's 'The Londoner Online' feed (iSyndicate, registered users only) which is a good tourist-oriented monthly feed. Moreover also comes up with the goods with an excellent travel news feed that includes material from CNN, ABC, Newsweek and Concierge.com.

One of the pleasures of travelling is coming home again and sharing your experiences with others (the only exception to this rule being 19 year olds who've just returned from their gap year running a small parascending concern in Majorca). In order to encourage the exchange of tips, you could put an interactive message board on your site. We recommend Ultraboard (***homepagetools.com/ultraboard***) which is powerful, easy to use, easy to navigate, fully customisable and includes a free bulletin board system.

To encourage traffic, put an interactive message board on your site

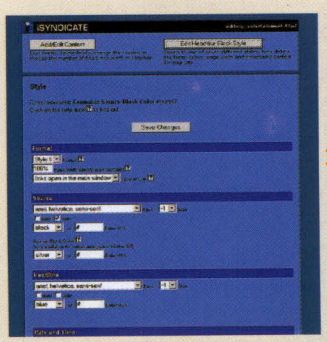
As much as a well-written feature can bring a city or country to life, it's so much easier if your readers can actually see the place. To this end, why not include a Webcam on your site? If you don't own one already, it could be time to pay a visit to ***outdoorcam.hypermart.net/topso/rankem.html*** or ***www.camcity.com/go/Webcams/outsidecams.html*** and start weighing up your options.

GAMES

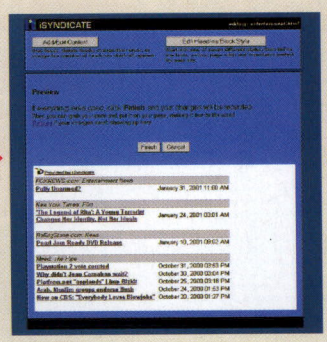
Of all the many subject areas encompassed by the Internet, computer games get more than their fair share of attention. Every single title released for the PC calls forth the elemental forces of the Web and 10 fan sites spring up faster than you can say 'joystick'. If you want to attract some of this traffic to your site, you're going to have to offer some valued-added content; something that lifts you above the normal rumour-mill news stories that fuel all the other sites.

If yours is a specialised rather than a general games site, then any of the news feeds supplied by Moreover will serve your needs (select Entertainment category, then Videogames, then Videogames News). Games Domain, GamePen, CoreMagazine and the Adrenaline Vault all have feeds you can place on your site. Remember, however, that many of these sites are also your competitors and so you could easily be helping their hit rates.

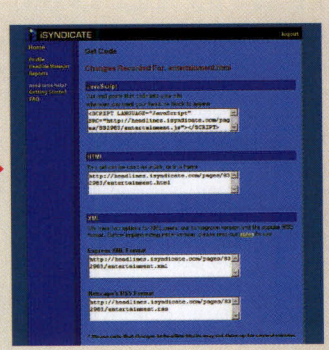
iSyndicate's line-up of games feeds is rather lacklustre, with just two of any use: GameCritics and InternetWire's Video Game news. Instead of using these, why not add something to your site that makes yours different to the myriad games sites? How about, for starters, an actual game? Browse the Comics



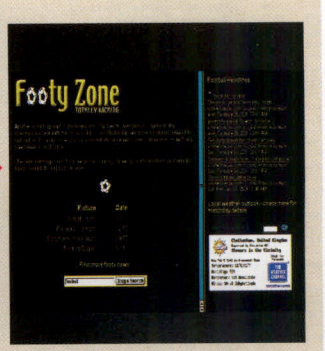
5 Excellent. We've added Mired's 'The Pipe' feed to our list. The problem is that the style of the feed itself is wrong for our site, so let's change it. We want a fairly plain style that doesn't detract too much from our actual content, and Style 1 fits that bracket quite effectively. We don't want the content across the entire page either, so let's drop that down to 75 percent. Finally, let's change the date style and then save the changes.



6 One of the great things about iSyndicate is that it's very configurable. If, once you've made some changes and previewed them, you're not happy just go back and change them. The changes we've made are pretty good, though: we dropped the three big providers' headlines down to one and added five fresh and funky headlines from Mired's superb feed. Happy that everything's looking good? Then hit that Finish button to save all the changes.



7 Now it's time to get down to the real nitty gritty. iSyndicate has helpfully supplied the code for your news feeds in a variety of languages, to suit your peculiar needs. In our case we're not terribly fussy, so we're going to opt for the plain HTML format. Just highlight all the code, open up the local version of your home page, paste it into the source code view, save it and upload it to your Web site.



8 Here's our finished page with football news, a weather box and a special search function. To bring a greater sense of community to the page, we could also add a discussion board (private or public) and even live chat if we were so inclined. The point is that once you've built your site, you should consider how you're going to get people to come back. Add sticky content (not necessarily stuff you've generated yourself) and watch your web counter climb skywards.

and Games category at iSyndicate to find SpaceRocks, an extremely good version of Asteroids, or if you'd rather have something a bit more sedate, how about a relaxing game of Hearts? You can find 10 titles at ***www.isyndicate.com/directory/partners/network/wildtangent.html***. You'll also find some good games over at Addiction Zone (***www.addictionzone.com***) although you will have to register before you can check them out.

Online gaming's a very sociable sort of hobby and the people that play it often hang out together in IRC chat rooms. So why not include a chat room that's hard-wired into your Web site? The nice people at LiveUniverse (***liveuniverse.com/world***) will kit you out with an excellent Java-based chatroom which can be used by anyone who visits your site. You could use it to keep in touch with your readers, to have live chats with games programmers or just as a place to swap hints and tips.

With such a plethora of games information out there you'll be doing your readers a favour by including a decent search facility. The search engine at Homepage Tools (***homepagetools.com/opendirectory***) searches a million sites, but is restricted to those vetted by the OpenDirectory editors. Instead why not include a more general search box from iSyndicate (select the Web Tools browse category) which enables you to include PC World, Hotgames and About.com's recommended sites.

You could probably build a music site without doing any writing

MUSIC

What with all the controversy surrounding Napster, it's easy to forget there are a vast number of completely legal Web sites out there, bringing the world of the fanzine to the Internet. If you operate a music-related site then you'll find a vast amount of material out there, from news feeds to charts, trivia and reviews. If you were so inclined, you could probably build an entire music site without actually having do any writing yourself.

iSyndicate leads the charge with an excellent line-up of very high quality music news feeds, which you can find in the Entertainment category by going to the Music and then Music News subcategories. mPlode's alternative music feed is excellent for those with their finger on the pulse, but if your tastes are a tad more mainstream, you might find the United International Press music feed to be a better option, or even Rolling Stone's. All three can be found in iSyndicate's Music sub-category.

Over at First Look (***www.firstlook.com***) they serve up the American music charts. What we liked about these is that you can actually listen to any of the top 10 tracks. If you want the real juice you have to go straight to the source of course, and in the case of music that means *Billboard* magazine; you can add a Billboard feed to your site and get five news headlines (iSyndicate's Music News subcategory again). And so your UK readership don't feel left out, you could include BPI's Eurocharts feed (Music Charts sub-category).

Adding some decent interactive content to your site is a great way of getting people to come back to you. LifeUniverse's (***www.lifeuniverse.com***) Quiz and Poll features are both impressively customisable. In the quiz's case you can set the questions and tailor the look and feel of the content to your site. The poll enables you to place an informal survey on your home page, which any visitor can vote in and see the instantly updated results.

Moreover has some high quality news/features/reviews feeds, as does Dotmusic. And of course, to encourage a real community to your site, be sure to include a message board so that your readers can keep in touch with each other and the musicians they follow. Ezboard (***www.ezboard.com***) is probably one of the best out there.

LIFESTYLE

The beauty of the Internet is its diversity; it gives a voice to everyone, no matter how strange or unique their views. But even if your Web site doesn't fall neatly into a category, you'll still be able to include some good syndicated material on your Web site. Admittedly it may not precisely target your particular niche (we didn't turn up any cheese-rolling news feeds for instance) but that doesn't mean you can't spread your net a bit wider.

If you have a black sense of humour, or you're just a naturally morose person, then Moreover's Obituary feeds in the Society category might interest you. If your tastes veer to the left-field then Moreover's Offbeat feeds (also in the

PORTAL PITFALLS

How to get it wrong»

■ **OVERCROWDING** Yes, it's all free and no, you didn't have to write it, but that's no excuse for cramming a vast number of free feeds onto your Web page. Remember that every feed you use has to be downloaded from the provider's Web site and you could slow your own page to a crawl if you use too many items, driving potential visitors away. If you do want to use lots of different sources, at least place them on different pages.

■ **TARGETING** Most Web sites are specifically targeted, aimed fairly and squarely at a niche audience. For this reason, think carefully about any content you include on your page. Will it honestly appeal to your readers? Is the subject matter too general to be of interest? Does the search engine you've included search the entire Internet or just specific sites of interest?

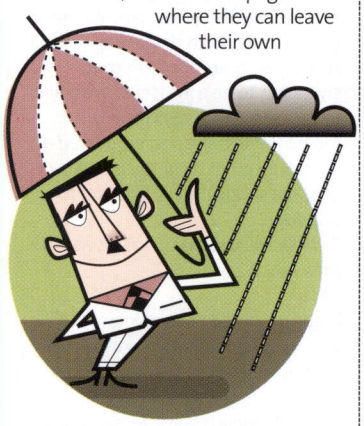
■ **CUSTOMISATION** Most of the syndicated material providers we looked at offer a customisation feature, letting you alter the look and feel of the actual feeds to fit in with your site. Take advantage of this and alter the foreground and background colours, along with the font to match the rest of your site. If you leave the feeds in the colours they came provided in, you'll end up with an ugly mess of a Web site.

■ **DEAD FEEDS** That's right, feeds die. The Web's a constantly changing universe and the news feeds you've placed on your site could just as easily be withdrawn by the provider. Don't include the feed code in your site and forget about it; check that it's all still live, but also that they haven't suddenly changed their format. To remove dead feeds, just lift the lines of code out of your HTML.

Society category) will undoubtedly make a worthy and fascinating addition to your Web site.

Minority interests are well served at Moreover in the Lifestyle and Society categories, where they have gay and Jewish news feeds, along with more general lifestyle material such as fitness, food and drink, and home and garden. iSyndicate has an even larger line-up with feeds from SourceMedia, BusinessWire and Fish4.co.uk covering everything from fashion to medicine (browse the relevant categories to find these).

Homepage Tools has a range of interactive features that could easily be incorporated into any lifestyle Web site. Perhaps the best of these are the Guestbook, in which visitors to your site can leave their own comments, and the Links page where they can leave their own



Both the Quiz and Poll features are impressively customisable

recommended links for other visitors to check out.

If you're having trouble finding the page furniture to build your site, you could do worse than to check out Homepage Tools' excellent range of animated gifs, photos, icons and clip art libraries. If you can't find the sort of material you're looking for under the broad subject headings that iSyndicate and Moreover tend to employ, then do remember to use their excellent search facilities, which can pinpoint the sort of feeds that you might ordinarily have over-looked.

Stuck for ideas? A browse through their respective categories is enough to inspire a toaster, so go to it. Turn that Web site into a portal – and take on the might of Bill Gates in his own back yard.

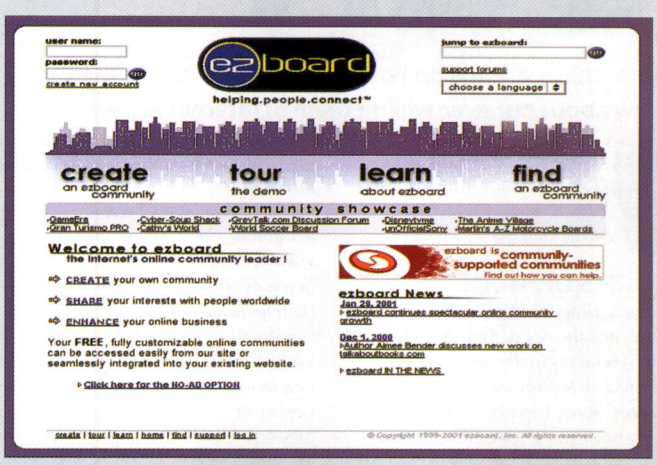
THE PLACES TO VISIT FOR THAT LOVELY FREE CONTENT

Syndication: the major players»

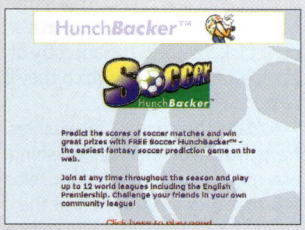
Once you start digging, you'll soon realise the problem with syndicated material is that there's so much of it. Unless you bring a shrewd editorial eye to the proceedings, you'll end up with lots of material that's completely irrelevant to your audience.

The other major consideration is that you don't have to use news or feature feeds. You may find other content is far better suited to the theme of your Web site, whether it's a Java based chat room, or a remotely hosted discussion forum.

What we do know is that with so much expert material on-hand, you'd be a fool to plug away on your own – with free feeds you've got a whole team at your disposal.



EZBOARD ***www.ezboard.com***
Set up your very discussion forum and open it up to the public. There's no limit on the number of boards you can have, either



HUNCHBACKER
www.myval.com
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ISYNDICATE
uk.isyndicate.com
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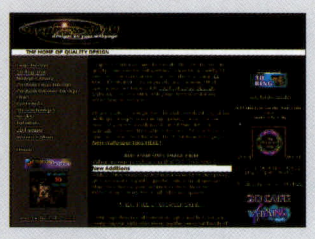

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www.graphics2000.freeserve.co.uk
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MYVAL
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ONEANDONLY
www.oneandonly.com
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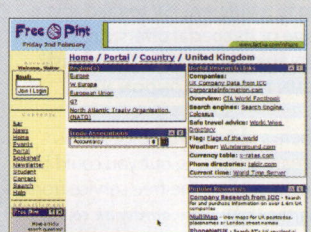

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www.freepint.co.uk
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Q&A

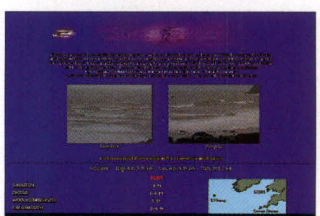
Something strange on your old PC? Who you gonna call? How about our ever-willing team of Internet experts?

The sender of the month's Good Question wins a Casio TV1800 Pocket Television, worth £129.99

SURF'S UP, DUDE

I'm a surfing fanatic (the cold wet kind, not the dry computerised kind) who regularly zooms down the M4 to Newquay to get some waves. Some friends of mine told me about some specialised surfing Web sites that detail where the best swells are and what the outlook will be. There's nothing worse than driving 300 miles only to be confronted by a millpond, so I'd greatly appreciate some assistance here.
MIKE CULHANE, MUSWELL HILL, LONDON

Bearing in mind that we're dealing with British weather – which could change before you've got to the end of the road, let alone Newquay – there are a number of sites offering surf forecasts. For SW England and the Gower peninsula, try the laid-back site at ***www.bath.ac.uk/~bssbjg/forecast.htm***. There's plenty of technical info available at ***www.getaforecast.com***, and good links at ***www.britsurf.org*** and Soul Surfer (***www.geocities.com/Pipeline/Halfpipe/1259/surfpro1.htm***). But all this dry data is no substitute for a Webcam, so check out ***www.surfstation.co.uk*** to see if surf's up in North Devon. And if the kind of miserable, grey scene that met our eyes when we took a look in February dissuades you from getting wet, browse the extensive links to various aspects of the surfer lifestyle – body piercing, tattoos, 'rad' music, eye infections...



Surfsport: getting wet on the Net

SILVER SURFING

I'm a retired civil servant and a recent convert to the joys of the Internet. I bought a PC primarily to help me in researching my family tree and have found it to be excellent for this purpose. However I find the Internet a rather intimidating place and was wondering whether you could recommend some good genealogy Web sites to get me started?
STANLEY PARKIN, ST IVES

Genealogy has taken off on the Web in a big way, and there are good introductions on how to use the Net to research your family tree to be found at ***www.xmission.com/~nelsonb/starte.htm*** and ***www.genuki.org.uk***. Another informative site with – appropriately enough – plenty of links is Suzy's Genealogy Page at ***www.geocities.com/heartland/3934/britain.htm***. But for the hardcore ancestor-tracer, there's only one site to hit: ***www.familysearch.org***. The elders of the Church of the Latter Day Saints (that's the Mormons to you and I) believe it's their task to record the ancestry of every living soul, after which they'll all go to Heaven.

To date, their tireless researchers have tracked down an astonishing 450 million family names and, nice folk that they are, they've put the lot online. The site is easy to search and the whole God-bothering side is kept very much in the background, so take advantage of it before the Rapture.

FamilySearch: find yourself family you'll wish you never knew you had...

TOYS ARE US

My wife is expecting our first child and we're both eagerly awaiting the big day. We live quite some distance from a large town or city and so find the whole concept of Internet shopping to be a godsend. We'd like to buy some nice toys for our forthcoming baby and wondered if you could point us in the direction of some shops that will deliver to our door?
CATHERINE AND JAMES WHITWORTH, PAINSWICK

Having realised that anyone who's heavily pregnant or has a new baby spends most of their time indoors, stores for new parents have an unsurprisingly heavy presence on the Web. To let yourself know what you're getting into, take a look at the terrifying 'Baby List' at ***www.baby-care-direct.co.uk***, then buy the warehouse-

Q&A GOOD QUESTION

DREAMCAST DILEMMA

I have a Dreamcast and currently access the Internet using the ISP service that came with it. I want to sign up to a different ISP to take advantage of its special offers. Are there any that support the Dreamcast?
JOHN PARSONS, LONDON N1

There's not much choice for Dreamcast users, but you could try and test-drive the free service from Aardvark at ***www.aardvaak.co.uk***. The recent announcement that Sega's to cease production of its games machine might well affect SegaNet – the Dreamcast ISP. If it closes or is left to wither on the vine, expect a whole load of competitive services to spring up.

Dreamcast: facing stiff competition

full of recommended equipment from the site. Another useful site is that of London's best-known toyshop, Hamleys, at ***www.hamleys.com*** – and by sticking to the online store you won't risk decapitation by their infamous model plane demonstrators. Toys R Us have a dedicated rug-rat section at ***www.babiesrus.co.uk***, which offers a huge range or baby-friendly toys backed up by powerful search tools. Finally, a couple of more specific sites: if you're a teddy bear fanatic, browse through delights such as the Woodland Collection at Cotswald Bears (***webspace.netmatters.co.uk/cotswold.bears***), or shop for toys from franchises such as Winnie the Pooh

Babycare Direct: a whole new world

and A Bug's Life at ***www.living-store.com***. You can even upload a photo of your new sprog cuddling an assortment of Teletubbies-related merchandise. Aaaah...

MESSED-UP MAIL

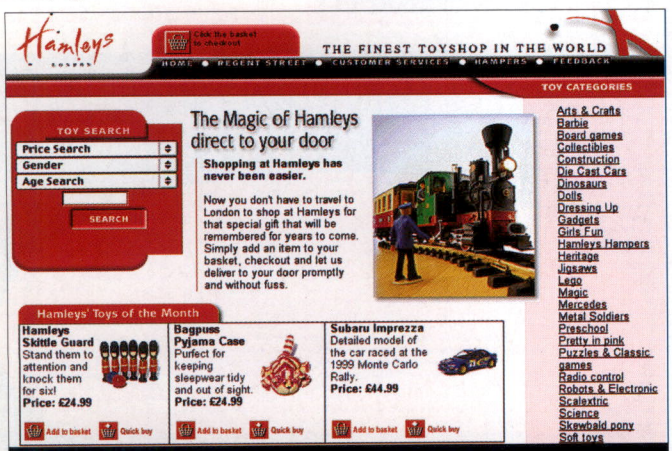
I'm a big fan of email, and have recently switched to using Outlook Express. By and large I'm very happy with the software, but some of my friends have said that my mails have turned into gibberish overnight. What am I doing wrong?
SIMON BENNETT, SOUTHPORT

All email programs are not created equal. Outlook is a very up-to-date piece of software and comes with plenty of bells and whistles, such as the ability to send mail in rich-text format (RTF) or HTML – the language used to create and display Web pages. However, if the people you're corresponding with are using older software, their packages might not be able to display the mail correctly – which is why they're complaining that your sparkling prose has suddenly become unintelligible. The answer is to make sure you send your mail as plain text. It means you'll lose a lot of the fancy gubbins – such as changes of font, different sizes and colours of text, and built-in links to Web sites – but at least you'll get your message across. Go into Outlook's preferences and look for and deselect a command that says something like, 'send mail as HTML'. As well as making sure your mail can be read by everyone, there's another advantage, too – the files you send will be far smaller and take up much less bandwidth, so you'll be cutting down on Internet clutter.

BEWARE THE WAREZ

I've been sent an anonymous email asking if I want to receive some 'warez'. The writer makes it sound like I'm being offered some free software. Would I be breaking the law if I accepted?
LINDA KING, PRESTON

You almost certainly would. Warez – pronounced 'wares' – is hacker-speak for pirated software. Those bad boys either remove the registration function or strip the copyright protection from legal (and often expensive) programs, then distribute it around the Net. Be warned that both the use and distribution of pirated software is illegal. The hackers like to justify their actions by saying that they're 'fighting the system' or encouraging Internet use, but the truth is that they're simply up to mischief. And remember, every time someone uses a bit of pirated software, legitimate users end up paying the price – as the companies make up for lost revenues by bumping up the cost of the next version.



Hamleys: one site you'll definitely want to hide from the children

QUICK QUESTION TIME. FINGERS ON THE BUZZERS...

FAQs

>I want to switch to an always-on Internet account as I work from home and use the Net a lot during the day. I'm told this will leave me wide open to hackers, who will be able to spot me more easily if I'm logged on for hours at a time instead of dialling in when I want to look at something. Is this correct and what can I do about it?
ANDREW EVERS, BEDFORD
It is correct, simply because you're spending many more hours online each day, so are statistically more likely to become a victim. But there's really no need to panic – the chances of a hacker 'taking over' your computer are extremely remote, and anyway most 'always-on' Internet connections chuck you off after a couple of hours! If you're genuinely concerned, however, consider purchasing a firewall. This is a piece a hardware that mediates traffic between your computer and the Net, designed to keep hackers out. Most companies employ firewalls as standard, and home users can pick one up for a few hundred pounds, with software versions at a fraction of that price. Take a look at an online electronics retailer such as Dabs (***www.dabs.co.uk***) for various examples.

Dabs: your first stop for the latest software

>I've inherited my brother's old modem as he got one free with his new PC. He has deleted the drivers for it, though, and the standard Windows drivers seem to make it run slower than it should. I can't find the drivers on the company's Web site as they don't support this model anymore. Can you help?
DUNCAN ELLIS, WASHINGTON, US
What you need is ***www.modemdriver.com***, which does exactly what it says on the can. It's a huge site stuffed full of antique bits of driver code, and if you can't find the one you need you can post a message and see if a modem geek can come to your rescue. Just remember that if the modem really is a museum piece and you're running an up-to-date operating system such as Windows NT, there's probably no driver available, so consider buying yourself a new one.

>I recently changed ISPs and installed a small setup script supplied by the company onto my PC. The dial-up works perfectly, but when I started Internet Explorer I found that my home page had been changed from my usual one (the MSN Web site – which I had customised to my own needs) to the ISP's home page. Can you tell me how to change it back?
SARAH ELLIS, NORWICH
This is a sneaky trick employed in the course of many ISPs' set-up routines, but luckily it's an easy matter to put right – whatever browser and platform you're using. Simply find your software's 'preferences' settings from the drop-down menus, scroll through until you find the 'default home page' command and replace the Web address your ISP has supplied with any site you want. If you're not sure of the URL or if it's a page you've previously customised for yourself, log on first then cut and paste it into the preferences file.

> I am looking to buy some computer equipment from a Web site based in the United States as it is selling for half the price I can get it in the UK. If I order something from America will I be charged additional tax when it arrives here, and will this be more than the cost saving and therefore not worth my while?
CHRIS O'BRIEN, NEWCASTLE
It'll come as no surprise to learn that there are a variety of taxes to pay on equipment imported into this country, the levels of which depend on the value of the order and the nature of the goods. The complexities are far too complicated to go into here, so check out HM Customs' site at ***www.hmce.gov.uk*** for details. Don't despair, however – if the savings on the gear you want are substantial and the shipping costs not too extortionate, you can still end up quids in.

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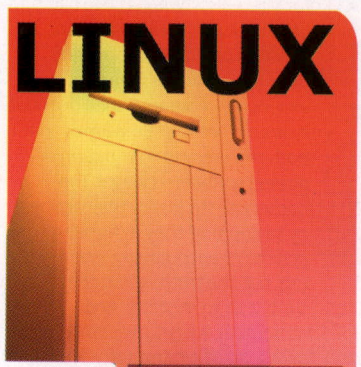

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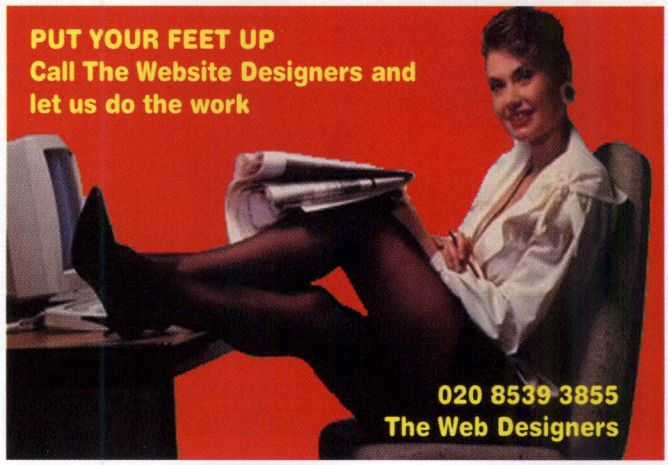

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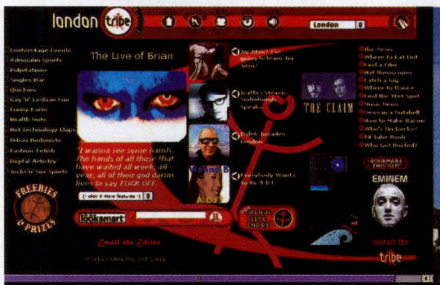
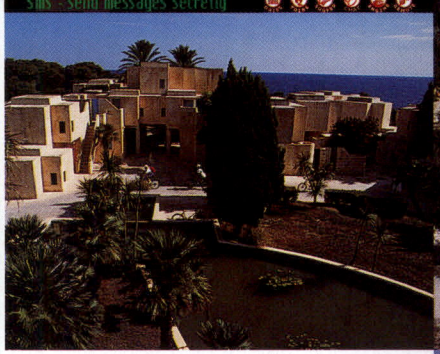
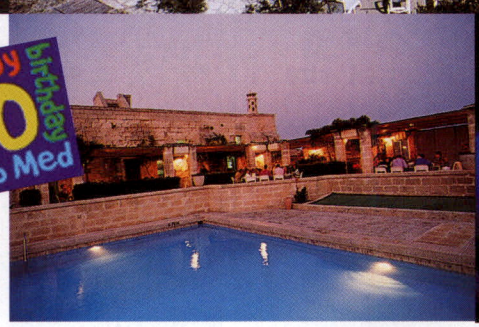
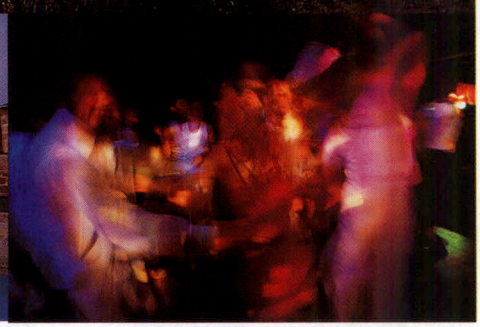




AND YOU COULD END UP HERE ▼





Check out London's best lifestyle and entertainment site and you could win a Club Med holiday for TWO.

We've teamed up with ***www.londontribe.com*** and Club Med to offer you the chance of winning an all-expenses-paid holiday in Otranto, Southern Italy – a top destination for fun-seekers.

Club Med is celebrating its 50th year and now offers a wide array of destinations in over 36 countries across five continents.

All you have to do to WIN is log on to ***www.londontribe.com***, click the Club Med icon and answer the question.

For a free Club Med Brochure, call 0700 007 007 007 quoting 10LT01. For further information and booking enquiries, call Reservations on 0700 2582 633 or visit ***www.clubmed.com***.

londontribe.com

The prize is a one-week all-inclusive stay for TWO adults complete with:

- ★ Return flights from London and transfers to/from the resort
- ★ Standard twin share accommodation
- ★ All meals with unlimited wine, beer, soft drinks with lunch and dinner
- ★ Nightclub
- ★ Most sports and qualified tuition
- ★ Fully comprehensive insurance

Club Med

ABTA No. V6608 ATOL No. 1020

Terms and conditions Prize draw open to UK residents aged 18 and over.

Employees of Club Med and their families are not eligible to take part. No purchase necessary. Only one prize draw entry may be redeemed per household. Only electronic form entries used within the Competition section will be accepted. This does not include emails. Players must supply full details and comply with all rules to be eligible for the prizes. No responsibility is accepted for ineligible entries or entries made fraudulently. The Promoter does not accept any responsibility for late or lost entries. Deadline for entries is April 21. The prize winners will be notified within 28 days of the closing date, and only the prize winner will be contacted. The holiday is redeemable until the end of September 2001, subject to availability and excluding peak holiday periods such as Easter period, months of July and August, and half term weeks.

Prize must be taken as stated, is subject to availability and cannot be deferred. There will be no cash alternatives. The Promoter reserves the right to alter the specifications of the prize should the prize be unavailable as a result of circumstances arising outside of its control, and which, in the opinion of the Promoter makes it necessary to cancel or change the competition at any stage. The Promoter's decision is final in every situation including any not covered above and no correspondence will be entered into. Entrants will be deemed to have accepted these rules and to agree to be bound by them when entering the competition.

The prize winner will receive the following: a seven-day all-inclusive Club Med holiday for two adults to Otranto. The prize includes: return flights from London; transfers to/from the village resort; standard twin-share accommodation; all meals with unlimited wine, beers and soft drinks with lunch and dinner; most sports and qualified tuition; evening entertainment and other leisure activities; fully comprehensive insurance.

The prize winner will be responsible for travel to and from London, The prize winner must pay any additional cost not included in the holidays prize, as per Club Med's current Summer 2001 brochure. Passports and visas as required must be arranged by the winner independently. The promoter accepts no responsibility for any arrangements not being made.

bookmarks»

:// Famous fans of the Web tell all

INTERVIEW: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURE: RETNA

Gareth Hunt

The New Avenger famed for 'magicking the beans' gets film production staff together through his site

So what's E-Media-C all about then?
I got together with David Rudland at the beginning of the year and now we've got locations, actors, actresses, facilities, casting directors, best boys. We're doing a one-stop shop right across our industry from an actor to a clapperman.

When did you come up with the idea?
About seven years ago I saw something on a CD-ROM. It all formulated in the bath but the idea came from Encarta; a postage stamp in the middle of the screen started to talk and I went 'Jiminy Cricket'. That's where it started.

When did you discover the Net?
It was a progression from the CD-ROM idea. I'm not totally au fait with it, I'm not what you'd call a whizz, but I'm fascinated with what it can do and the way it will change things; it can save time in so many areas.

What else do you use the Net for?
At home I've got my emails and my boy's always on it playing games. I use it a lot at work when we're twiddling with the site and checking the way other companies do things. And of course I book the odd flight.

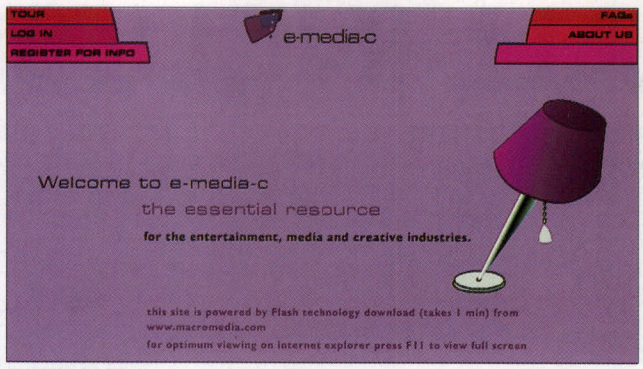
Have you looked yourself up online?
Yes. I've found I'm a year younger than I should be, which is quite nice. People have done a lot of research and it amazed me how much they're into a lot of the work I've done as an actor. There's a great industry out there that uses the Net for memorabilia.

Is the Net the future for film production?
You can sit behind a desk and get yourself well under way. You can sit down and cast a film, locate it and even find a budget. Once the information is in there, you could probably do 85 percent of a film or television series via the Net.

What would you change about the Internet?
If I was elected President of the Internet I'd make it totally free. I don't know how you'd do it though. And I'd get someone to come up with a really good idea for how to advertise my site.

If you found your head grafted onto a naked male's body on a Web site, would you sue?
No names, no pack-drill, but a comedy programme did something similar; you're up there to be a face on a dartboard, that's the nature of the business. So the answer's no. As long as he had a good body.

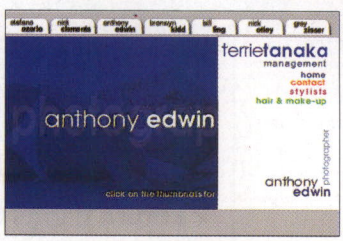
GARETH'S PICK OF THE WEB



E-MEDIA-C ***www.e-media-c.net***
The 'one-stop shop' of which Gareth is a director allows film and TV producers to browse for the best staff, in front of and behind the camera.

AOL
www.aol.co.uk
'I use it all the time. Some people don't like it but I find it very good.'

HINT
www.hintmag.com
Online fashion magazine which profiles the freshest faces in modelling and has a nice line in 'who, what and wear' fashion gossip.



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www.terrietanaka.com
A good site for finding photographers, hair and make-up artists and stylists.

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